The Arab people and the early Islamic period

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MA by Research

2008

Ustinov College

Institute for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies

Durham University

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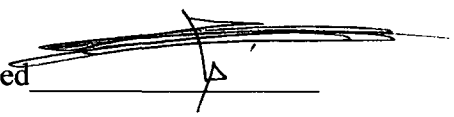
Signed 

Dated 20/04/2008

Abstract

This MA thesis, entitled The Arab People and The Early Islamic Period, has been written in response to the post 9/11 interest in the Arab people and early Islam among Western academics. It gives a brief account of pre-Islamic Arabia, the beginnings of Islam and the philosophies and ideologies contained in the religion in an attempt to address the following two fundamental questions:

1. Are there any real grounds for the widely-held perception of the Arab people as a backward race, uncivilised, fragmented, unwilling to develop and making no contribution to the international community? Does their history support this perception?
2. Do the origins of Islam and the way it developed and expanded during its earliest days support current criticisms that Islam itself is an inherently violent religion?

A study of the theories of the Arabs as a Semitic race, their geographical distribution and civilisations, the tribes of pre-Islamic Arabia and the ruling powers which influenced the region up to the 6th century will be presented, before an examination of the origins of Islam, from the birth of the Prophet Muḥammad in AD 570 to the death of the fourth Caliph in AD 661. It was during this period that Islam reached its zenith as a religion. During this time the essential, fundamental Islam can be surveyed - before imperial Islam was born, before it was adapted to suit differing needs and before it fragmented into sects. All original knowledge of Islam came from this period, what followed merely being derivatives of it.

By examining the nature of the expansion of Islam - whether it was spread by military force or through trade and missionaries - we attempt to address questions concerning the Prophet's confrontations with the enemies of Islam. Were he and his caliphs impoverished, power-seeking imperialists or did they just respond to challenges resulting from what they saw as a duty to make the Prophet's ideology known to people?

The conclusion will argue that the Arab people, those of pre-Islamic Arabia as well as those of today, are direct descendents of the early inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula, bound by

common history and language with no ancestral discontinuity. Arabia is the birthplace of the earliest civilisations and has always been the home of many religions and ideologies. This region has always played an important role in other civilisations, in terms of imperial expansion, trade and the exchange of ideas. Many of its qualities were adopted and encompassed within those other civilisations.

That Arabia became the birthplace of Islam seems natural, given that it has always been a region rich in ideas. Its emergence was also timely, as the other two monotheistic religions had been, coming at just the right moment for humanity. Islam embraces other faiths and religions, does not call for the enslavement of mind or body and does not encourage violent acts. The negative perceptions of Arabs as anti-establishment and violent and of Islam as a dangerous religion which threatens humanity is ill-founded. The reactions to Islam currently being witnessed mirrors events of 7th century when the Byzantine and Sassanian superpowers sought to secure land and natural resources under the pretext of ideological differences. It is likely that this region will always be a theatre of conflict, due to its geographical location as a crossroads between continents.

This study is divided into the following four chapters (excluding introduction and conclusions):
Chapter 1: Ancient Arabia and the World Leading to the 6th Century
Chapter 2: Prophet Muḥammad and the Birth of Islam
Chapter 3: The Rāshīdūn Period
Chapter 4: Islam – The Ongoing Legacy

In surveying and summarising such a large span of time, from the early history of man up to the 7th century, this work gives a broad overview rather than going into great detail on any of the topics covered. Whilst referring to other civilisations, such as ancient Egyptian, Greek and Persian where pertinent, this work focuses on the Arabian Peninsula and on the civilisations within that geographical region. In addition, there are few references from the time of the early Muslim expansion which reflect the opinions of opposing sides. References from the 9th century onward are more widely available. Therefore, it was decided that presenting a history of the misrepresentation of Islam was beyond the scope of

this MA, given that extensive research would need to be carried out in order to present an accurate, balanced account.

This work is addressed to non-Arabic speaking readers. Regarding research, a decision was made to rely for sources on Western books and references easily available to examiners and readers. It was considered that the use of Arabic references could prove problematic, as understanding them without full knowledge of the Arabic language would be difficult. As there is no linguistic aspect to the scope of this thesis and given that it is addressed to non-Arabic speaking readers, a standardised simplified transliteration system has been used.

Contents

The Arab People, Early Islam and The West

Introduction

In the aftermath of the events of 11 September 2001, Western perception of Arabs and Muslims has been dominated by a media frenzy which has suggested that the events of that day were the legacy of a faith built on aggression. Despite all attempts by Western authorities and community leaders to assure the public that Islam is a peaceful religion and Arabs and Muslims are law-abiding citizens, and that those appalling acts were carried out by brainwashed criminals, the media has continued to present Islam as a religion of confrontation and war. The attack on the World Trade Center prompted the Bush administration to make the "War on Terror" its highest priority, arguing that any extreme measures it was forced to take were justified by the country's need to defend itself, its lifestyle and its values. Pre-emptive strikes were thereby launched on countries believed to be harbouring terrorists or developing weapons of mass destruction, such as Afghanistan and Iraq. The unexpectedly fierce resistance facing the American-led coalition of international forces in those countries has been blamed on insurgents whose motivation has come from the teachings of religious fanatics who are believed to be promoting suicide bombing and other acts of reprisal in a holy war or jihad on the "infidels", the Western forces.

The anti-Islamic sentiments that rose to the surface after 9/11 were reinforced four years later, on 30 September 2005, when a Danish newspaper[1] published satirical images of Prophet Muḥammad which implied that he had based his religion on a foundation of military conquest. Newspapers across Europe and America circulated these images despite the outrage expressed by Muslims around the world. Similar unrest was created recently when, on 15 September 2006, Pope Benedict XVI gave a lecture during a visit to Germany in which he implicitly linked jihad with terrorism by quoting a 14th century Christian emperor who said that Prophet Muḥammad had brought the world "evil and inhuman things", and that Islam as a religion displays an absence of logical reasoning[2]. In response,

[1] Jyllands-Posten

[2] Lecture of The Holy Father, Aula Magna of the University of Regensburg, Tuesday 12 September 2006, Faith, Reason and the University, Memories and Reflections

whilst assuming an unreported distance between the quotation given by the Pope and the Pope's actual position, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Carey of Clifton, called for more Muslim leaders to condemn violence perpetrated by Muslims[3]. When demands for an apology from the Pope were heard around the world, the former Prime Minister of Spain, José Aznar, suggested that it was "absurd" for the West to apologise when Muslims never do, arguing that the Muslim occupation of Spain was never apologised for[4].

In addition to this political and religious dimension of the Western perception of Islam, there are also economic and social implications as judged by most international institutions and non-governmental organisations dedicated to evaluating human development statistics around the world. They suggest that the poverty and backwardness of the Arab and Muslim world have resulted from the chaotic and non-reformist nature of its people, who are not believed to be capable of conforming to international standards of development and are therefore seen as being unable to make any notable contribution to the global community. Lack of freedom and democracy and failing economic policies are believed to be inherent characteristics of an ideology that fails to call on people to improve their lifestyle and coexist peacefully with others. Those who promote this kind of thinking see the Islamic faith and the Arabic language as obstacles to 21st century modernity and democracy, obstacles which require radical solutions in order to be overcome.

In light of these facts, the Arab world is coming under increasing pressure to Westernise its education system by altering school curricula to move away from the focus on the Koran and to exclude controversial versus of the Koran from education. There is a move to increase students' dependence on the use of the English language, which is already being used in the teaching of subjects such as science, mathematics and computer literacy. It is felt that decreasing the use of the Arabic language in education would lessen the Arab and Muslim people's willingness to study the Koran and the inspiration for jihadist ideas would thereby become unfashionable.

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[3] The Cross and The Crescent (The Clash of Faiths in an Age of Secularism), The Beach Lecture, Newbold College, Bracknell, 18th September 2006

[4] Published in The International Herald Tribune, 23rd September 2006

Since 9/11, there has been a shift in the focus of Western academic and media scrutiny from modern Middle Eastern issues to the events and ideologies of the early Islamic period. To Western academics, classical world history starts in the Greek Empire in the 6th century BC, and extends to the Hellenistic era and the Roman-Byzantine Empire, and when discussing the subject of the Arab people and Islam, the majority of texts and references have traditionally begun their studies from the 6th century AD. This gives the impression that prior to the 6th century, Arabia was inhabited only by nomadic desert-dwelling tribes who were backward and impoverished and had no advanced civilisation of their own. This failure to recognise the advanced ancient civilisations of Arabia gives Western society a one-millennium advantage over Muslim civilisation and early Western culture and society are therefore thought to have been superior to anything that existed in Arabia at that time.

Evidence is being sought in early Islamic history to prove that Islam was riddled with precedents of the violence and terror supposedly being carried out in the name of the Islamic faith today. Recent events are seen as being a re-enactment of the clash of civilisations that took place in the 7th century AD, when the Arabs were thought to have capitalised on the weakness of the great empires to establish a civilisation based on the destruction of others. The contemporary clash between the Islamic and Western civilisations was predicted by famous scholars like Samuel Huntingdon prior to the events in New York in 2001.

21st century global politics to date have been greatly affected by issues of religious and cross-cultural misunderstanding and many questions have arisen about the Middle East, its inhabitants and its various religions, ethnic groups and sects. Western perceptions can quickly become misconceptions through a lack of knowledge about the history and development of the Arab people - whether they were originally nomadic or settled; whether they had a civilisation; whether Arabian culture is inherently violent; what led to the development and spread of Islam; whether Muhammed was a warrior prophet who used holy war and jihad to unite Arabia and create an Islamic state; whether Islam itself precipitates racial hatred, bigotry and intolerance. When people see media portrayals of apparent holy wars, they wonder whether Islam as a religion could actually thrive on brainwashing its believers into senselessly dying in the name of God.

This work, in as much as a Masters degree allows, attempts to address the many questions concerning the early history of the Arab people and the emergence of the Islamic faith that have arisen in the post 9/11 era by factually and objectively examining Arabia, its people, civilisations, culture and religion.

Chapter One examines the physical geography of the Arab region and how it impacted upon and shaped communities and events. It also discusses the evolution of man's history and looks at different hypotheses about their biblical connections and Semitic roots. By surveying the ancient civilisations and kingdoms of the Middle East, it demonstrates that the Arab people played a major role in the evolution of the classical civilisations of East and West, and that Arabia was the birthplace of essential concepts such as religion and empire, and also of many of the world's earliest scientific, technological and artistic advances. This chapter goes on to summarise world events as they stood before the birth of Islam, and discusses the origins, ideologies and development of the various religions that existed in the region. It attempts to highlight the eventual significance of Islam and its revolutionary effect on Arabia by discussing the composition of the inhabitants of the region and the economic and social order under which they lived prior to the inception of the faith.

The second chapter focuses on the birth of Muḥammad and the social order into which he was born, and attempts to address many of the controversial issues surrounding both his message and his endeavours to consolidate Islam in the hostile environment into which he introduced it. It makes clear that by the end of Muḥammad's life he had transformed Arabia from a comparatively lawless region to one that was capable of achieving and maintaining political and economic unity and cohesion.

Chapter Three, The Rāshīdūn Period, provides an insight into the various challenges that faced Muḥammad's successors upon his death, and discusses how the final evolution of Muḥammad's message during the early Islamic period allowed the faith to inspire the development of a more political dimension, which laid the foundations for the eventual establishment of Islamic Arab states and subsequently Islamic empires.

Chapter Four analyses the different elements that form the foundations of Islamic belief. It suggests that the ideology provided a force for the social, economic and political change that was needed in Arabia. The sophisticated legal apparatus contained in Shari'ah law is analysed, along with the philosophies, directives and doctrines that led to the development of an Islamic civilisation and managed to catapult the Muslims into a new phase in history. The chapter concludes with examination of reactions to Islam by both religious groups and ruling powers.

In the fifth and final chapter, conclusions are drawn concerning the true nature of the Arabian people and their lineage. The fundamental beliefs and ideologies of Islam are assessed, in relation to the other monotheistic religions and with regard to the claims that Islam is inherently violent. The misrepresentation of Islam is discussed in the light of post-9/11 concerns and media-induced fervour and parallels are drawn between reactions of today and those seen during the earliest days of Islam.

As mentioned in the abstract, a decision was made to conduct research from Western references. This decision was made in the interests of objectivity and as a guard against any suggestion of bias. It was also believed that this restriction would facilitate a fuller understanding of Western perceptions. As Middle Eastern references are not easily available and would require an understanding of Arabic, their use would have placed the reader at a disadvantage.

Also with regard to accessibility for Western readers, the transliteration of Arabic names followed a simplified method, the main reasons for this being legibility, clarity and consistency, so enabling the reader to understand the Arabic names with ease and without requiring an understanding of Arabic.

The initial framework of the thesis was continuously revised as the research progressed.
Due to both the broad nature of this work and practical restraints, it was not possible to use published academic papers and journals as sources. As each of these covers a very specific area and as they are often argumentative, it was felt that it would be more productive to

confine the research to published books, encyclopaedias and atlases. Most available, up-to-date references which discuss the ancient civilisations of the Middle East, the semitic origins of Jews and Arabs, the theologies of monotheistic religions, the history of the early period of Islam or provide an analysis of the military expansion of early Islam were referred to during the research for this MA. These works were divided into those which were considered essential references and those which were considered useful for the verification of salient points.

The general approach to the presentation of the research is to give a broad and balanced account of events with enough detail to exemplify and illustrate the information given. To this is added an interpretation and analysis, an assessment of which conclusions can be considered logical and which can not.

It is hoped that this work will serve as good background material for any enthusiast who requires a chronologically simplified, ordered history of the origins of the Arab people, their contributions to civilisation and their transformation under early Islam. It is also hoped that it will help in clarifying some of the confusion and some of the misconceptions which are prevalent today.

Chapter 1: Ancient Arabia and the World prior to the 6th Century

The aim of this chapter is to provide an insight into the historical continuity of ancient Arabia up to the birth of Islam in the 6th century, highlighting key elements and concepts of man's development in Arabia, his civilisation, religion and culture.

It could be said that three main factors influenced the development of man in Arabia[5]. The first of these was the region's geographical location. Arabia acted as a land bridge between Africa, Asia and Europe, and the movement of people and ideas between the continents had a developmental effect on the region's inhabitants. The second factor was the region's physical diversity, its varied terrain and weather patterns determined whether communities were settled or nomadic. The third factor was the combination of favourable climactic and geographical conditions which allowed civilisation in the region to succeed, grow and flourish. It was these favourable conditions that gave Ancient Arabia the opportunity to become the birthplace of civilisation and religion, and enabled it to survive in spite of the continuous turmoil to which it was subjected at the hands of man.

Since the earliest recorded history of man, the inhabitants of Arabia populated not only the whole of the Arabian Peninsula, but also a large part of the Fertile Crescent. Semitic tribes, being Arab, Hebrew and their derivatives, established a civilisation long before the Greek and Persian Empires[6]. Their settled communities, whether in the northern or southern part of the peninsula, developed sophisticated agricultural and small craft industries, and as they were the first to domesticate and harness the power of such animals as horses and camels, they were able to excel in trade in the remotest parts of the known world. Those who settled on the Levant side of the Mediterranean even went on to become great shipbuilders and pioneers in maritime trade. It was in Arabia that the first Semitic language and the first written alphabet were developed[7] and the people's understanding of the concepts of commodity, law and order and religion predated that of any other civilisations. Their knowledge of science, meteorology and manufacture was also extremely sophisticated. Those who came into contact with the wealth of industry, ideas and culture of Arabia, such

[5] Anglin, J.P. & Hamblin, W.J., 1993, p 8
[6] Bravington, A., 2003, pp 11,21
[7] Haywood, J., 2001, pp 1.03, 1.04, 1.07

as the Greeks, Persians and Romans, were able to make use of what they had learned to go on to establish their own civilisations and empires. This made them more conscious of the importance of the region and they relentlessly sought to dominate it.

Before the birth of Islam in the 6th century, the people of the time knew the world as the geographic land mass of Europe, North Africa, the Nile Valley, including Abyssinia, Asia Minor, Arabia and Central Asia, covering India and China[8]. The area from the Atlantic Ocean to the Indus River in India was controlled by two great empires - the Byzantine Empire, whose state religion was Christianity, and the Sassanian Empire, which was largely Zoroastrian. The two empires engaged in almost continuous conflict, using the Fertile Crescent as a theatre for war, although the territories of each empire remained more or less the same.

The continuous state of political and economic unrest, which lasted for centuries, made the life of most of the people extremely harsh. There was no law and order to protect the average man, neither was there any religious tolerance to further the civilisation of the community, nor any social justice or racial or sexual equality or morality[9]. It was a world in which the supreme reign of the elite was unquestioned, and their power dictated the pace of life for others. The effect was an atmosphere of violence and unpredictability which resulted in intellectual stagnation, manifesting itself in mass ignorance and superstition[10].

As for Arabia and its inhabitants, the Arab people, with the exception of the tribes in the Fertile Crescent, were virtually unaffected by the tensions brought about by the warring empires. They used the physical setting of Arabia to establish their own political, economic and religious autonomy, taking advantage of the fact that they were outside of the jurisdiction of either empire. For example, Mecca, which was a trading post for caravans travelling from the north to the south of Arabia, later became a successful enterprise in the protection and organisation of the business of religion. The Arabs also played a vital part in providing the essential service of facilitating trade and communication between the African and Asian continents, as well as between the two main powers.

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[8] Nicolle, D., 2004, pp 6,7
[9] Bell, R., 2005, p 1
[10] Cameron, A., 2003, pp 84, 100

1.1. The Physical Setting

The physical setting of Arabia, as outlined by its natural borders, can be defined as follows: the peninsula starts from the Red Sea in the west, extends to the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea in the south, runs east to the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Gulf, and follows north to meet Mesopotamia and the Levant[11]. The Fertile Crescent starts where the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers meet at Shatt al-Arab, then moves northwest between the two rivers before crossing the central Syrian city of Palmyra, then goes southwest to Damascus and Petra and ends up in Aqaba where the Red Sea meets the Sinai Peninsula.

The terrain of the Arabian Peninsula consists of a central desert region which stretches east to the Arabian Gulf and northeast the Euphrates. The desert region is surrounded by high terrain and mountains which skirt the coasts of the Red Sea, the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Oman. (See map 1)

The geographical factors of the peninsula divide the region into provinces. On the west coast are the two provinces of Hijaz and Tuhama. In the south are the high grounds of Yemen, Hadhramaut and Oman. In the east is the province of al-Orud, which includes Northern Oman, Yamama and Bahrain. The central section of the peninsula is dominated by the Najd plateau, which is surrounded by three deserts (Nufud to the west, Dhana to the north, The Empty Quarter to the south). The coastal mountainous regions, which meet the seas from the west, south and southeast, prevent moisture from the sea from travelling inland. Given the fact that there is very little rainfall and no rivers, but plenty of valleys and underground water systems, agriculture can be sustained only on the outskirts of the peninsula and in the central plateau, leaving the majority of the territory hot, dry, rugged and inaccessible to most outsiders but those with the greatest navigational and survival skills. In contrast, the northern territory, which experiences regular rainfall, can better be described as ranging from fertile to semi-arid due to the seasonal flood effects of the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers. This kind of topography means that the major Arabian cities,

[11] Hitti, P.K., 2002, p 14

from where most ancient civilisation and regional kingdoms emerged, are found on the perimeter of the peninsula[12].

The varied Arabian environment, which ranges from harsh to pleasant, has had a major impact on the activities of its inhabitants since ancient times. The majority of the population of Arabia is forced to centre around specific places where seasonal agriculture, animal husbandry and trade can be sustained[13]. As only a minority of inhabitants is able to survive in the areas with challenging terrain and weather conditions, there is thought to have been little or no migration to these regions. The inhabitants of Arabia could therefore be divided according to where they lived. The settled Arab lived in cities and constituted the majority of the population and the Bedouin lived either on the perimeter of the Arabian Desert or on the outskirts of the major trade cities[14].

The inhabitants could be further divided with respect to their geographical location - the Arabs in the north, who lived in the provinces of Iraq and Syria, the Arabs of the south, who lived in Yemen and Oman, and the Arabs who lived in the cities along the trade routes, such as Mecca and Yathrib (Medina) and the Bahrain province of the Arabian Gulf, not to forget the central plateau of Najd[15].

The nomads were bound together in relationships, with their own codes of honour and tribal systems, and in a continuous search for the means with which to maintain their livelihood. They were illiterate, depending solely upon verbal communication, and they had no political unity. The Bedouin lived between the desert and the settled communities, not recognising external powers and therefore not abiding by the laws of the cities around which they lived. They supported the economy of the settled people with their animals and small crafts, and played a role in trade when the weather permitted[16]. It is evident, then, that the perception of the Bedouin as desert-dwellers who lived exclusively in the wilderness and were completely cut off from civilisation is misleading.

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[12] Barnes, I., 2006, p 12
[13] Hitti, P.K., 2002, pp 17,18
[14] Barnes, I., 2006, p 14
[15] Hitti, P.K., 2002, p 17
[16] Hitti, P.K., 2002,p p 19, 21

The Arab people, whether settled or nomadic, have had to time their activities to fit between the climactic cycles of the year. For example, the Bedouin chose seasonal times to move with their animals from one pasture to another, and the city inhabitants changed the direction of their caravans according to weather conditions, that is, to face north in the summer and south in the winter. Even from the earliest inception of religion, prior to Judaism, Christianity and Islam, pilgrimages took place to holy shrines in Jerusalem and Mecca which were timed to coincide with the coolest four months of the year[17].

Although the seas and the gulf around Arabia provided access to maritime trade from the Mediterranean to Africa and Asia, which other nations took advantage of, little is known of the seafaring activities of the Arabs settled in the peninsula, or of the existence of any major ports, in pre-Islamic times. With the exception of crossing straits such as the Bab al Mendab between Yemen and Africa and the Strait of Hormuz between Oman and Persia, inland trading routes were the preferred method for commerce and travel[18].

1.2. The Arabs as a Semitic People

Historians cannot agree on a specific description of the origins of the Arab people, but there are three theories about Arabs being Semitic[19]. The first theory, that the Semitic people are direct descendents of Sam (or Shem), son of Noah, is significant in that it is believed by Arabs and Jews alike, despite the fact that it is archaeologically unproven. Sam is thought to have been the father of a long line of important figures in biblical history, including, according to most monotheistic religions, Abraham, who is seen as the father of all prophets[20]. It is thought that Abraham was born around 1700 BC in either Ur, a city in Sumer in Southern Mesopotamia, or Urfa in Asia Minor, and that he and his wife Sarah and his believers moved to Harran, then further south to Canaan, in Palestine. Abraham made an unsuccessful journey to Egypt, where the pharaoh found his concept of a monotheistic faith unacceptable[21]. When it later seemed that his wife Sarah was unable to bear him an heir, Abraham took an Egyptian wife, Hajar, who gave birth to Ishmael, though Sarah then

[17] Hitti, P.K., 2002, pp 100, 101, 104
[18] Nicolle, D., 2004, pp 9, 10, 20
[19] Nicholson, R.A., 2004, p 15
[20] Hitti, P.K., 2002, p 9
[21] Barnavi, E., 1992, p 3

gave birth to another son, Isaac. Abraham is believed to have begun a journey south towards Yemen with Hajar and Ishmael, who are thought to have settled halfway to Yemen in the area which later became known as Mecca. The consensus among Arab and Jewish historians is that Arab Semitic tribes are descendents of the line which began with Ishmael, and that Isaac, who remained in Palestine, fathered the Jewish people[22].

Some historians[23], conversely, have studied the evidence of comparative human characteristics and language and based their ideas about the origins of the Semitic people on concepts of evolution. As man is thought to have originated in Africa, these historians suggest that the Semitic people are most likely to have started in Abyssinia, then migrated to Yemen and established their civilisation on the fertile steppes of Southern Arabia. Out of that population, some tribes are then thought to have migrated north, some following the Red Sea and settling in the Levant, others taking the Arabian Gulf route and settling in Mesopotamia. Therefore, Arabia can be considered the cradle of the Semites. The conclusion of this theory is that the Semitic language had its origins in Arabic, which remained uncorrupted when used in Bedouin society, and was altered according to contacts and environment when people migrated north[24]. (See map 3)

The third theory of the origin of the Semitic people is that rather than being a race which either descended from Sam or originated in Abyssinia, they were actually the inhabitants of all of Arabia, north and south, who were bound by geography, culture and language[25]. The people of Arabia spoke a common Semitic language with small local deviations, and with time the language evolved from Sabaean, Sumerian and Akkadian into Aramaic, Hebrew and Arabic. Proponents of this theory believe that because the Semitic people of ancient times were separated from other nations by natural boundaries, they developed into one homogenous race with genetic characteristics that differentiate Arabs and Jews from the people of other races[26].

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[22] Farrington, K., 2006, p 10
[23] Hitti, P.K., 2002, pp 10, 13
[24] Nicholson, R.A., 2004, p 18
[25] Smart, N., 1999, p18
[26] Hitti, P.K., 2002, p 9

The ancestry of ancient Arab tribes, knowledge of which was passed on verbally through the generations, can be divided into two main groups. The first is the vanished Arab, consisting of tribes such as the 'Ad, Thamud, Tussum, Jadis and Jorhum. They are referred to in the Bible, in ancient Arab poetry, and in the Koran, which states that they perished through natural disaster brought upon them as punishment for their wrongdoing[27]. Although these tribes left ruins scattered throughout Arabia, it is not known when they vanished or whether they left a traceable ancestry. The second group is the existing Arabs, comprised of two main tribes, Adnan and Qahatan, which originated in the Hijaz region and are believed to be descendents of Ishmael. After Qahatan went south to populate Yemen, two other tribes, the Kahlan and Himyār, emerged. It is claimed that the Kahlan migrated north from Yemen and settled in the Fertile Crescent, while the Himyār remained in Yemen[28]. (See map 10)

1.3. Early Civilisation

Archaeological evidence has proven that the people who populated Yemen and Northern Arabia in ancient times were afforded the opportunity to develop faster than any other nation on Earth during the same period. Given the favourable weather conditions and the fact that they experienced very few of the natural disasters that plagued other nations, such as hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, volcanoes and tsunamis, the ancient Arabs had the freedom to consider the ways in which they could use all the means available to them to improve their lives[29]. Ancient civilisation in Arabia dates back as far as 10,000 BC, when there is evidence of man harvesting wild cereals in Syria[30]. In 9000 BC, man was able to herd flocks of sheep in Iraq and develop incipient agriculture in the Fertile Crescent and Yemen. By 8000 BC, wheat and other crops were being harvested and made into different kinds of bread, which became the staple food of the people of the time, and by 7700 BC, people were developing methods of weaving to create textiles[31]. In addition, people of the Middle East had discovered a way to cast copper into different shapes and were able to

[27] Nicholson, R.A., 2004, p 3
[28] Nicholson, R.A., 2004, p 11
[29] Overy, R., 1999, pp 36, 38, 52, 54
[30] Haywood, J., 2001, p 108
[31] Van De Mieroop, M., 2004, p 11

exploit its advantages over wood and stone, thereby bringing about the Copper Age. There is evidence of the implementation of irrigation schemes in 6000 BC, when animal farming was also flourishing, and camels and horses were being domesticated for purposes of transport and war[32].

By 4000 BC, the Middle East had become the first place where tin was mixed with copper to make bronze, which was a harder material that could be used in the production of such things as cooking implements, fastenings, helmets, and tools to create stone carvings. The first known cities were also established during this time, especially in places like Uruk in Mesopotamia. The earliest writing was later developed in Sumeria, allowing the civilisation of man to take a quantum leap forward. By 2500 BC, wheeled wagons were being used as fast chariots, paving the way for the establishment of the world's first known empire, the Akkadian[33]. In about 1600 BC, the world's first phonetic alphabet was developed by the Phoenicians in the Levant, who also established the world's first maritime trading colony in 1000 BC. In 671 BC, the Iron Age was introduced by the Assyrians, who were able to heat metal to very high temperatures in order to melt it into various shapes. Being in possession of iron, the strength of which made it far superior to copper and bronze in the production of arms and armour, the Assyrians held the primary tool of empire, and had a technological advantage over other nations.

All this points to the fact that the development of human civilisation was taking place Arabia centuries before empires and kingdoms on any other continent were claiming their place in the history of man's civilisation. It is therefore apparent that the Arab people played an integral part in early human development, and the claim that Arabs had no part in the growth of civilisation is incorrect.

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[32] Hitti, P.K., 2002, p 20
[33] Woolf, G., 2005, p 64

1.4. Ancient Kingdoms

Commonly held views describe the Arab people who existed prior to the introduction of Islam as nomadic with no recognisable civilisations, empires or culture linking them to the ancient civilisations of northern and southern Arabia. In fact, close examination of these early civilisations proves that the Arab people are directly linked to the development of the indigenous kingdoms of Mesopotamia, the Levant and Yemen, all of which predate the earliest Persian, Greek and Roman empires[34]. The relocation of people from one area of the Arabian Peninsula to another occurred frequently, as a result of a group's need to find better natural resources, to avoid conflict or to seek out a better way of life. Such movement resulted in the development of kingdoms in different parts of the peninsula. It's likely that groups of Arabs initially migrated northwards, resulting in the civilisations of the Fertile Crescent. Either at the same time or later on, people from these northern regions may have migrated southwards, mixing with the local population. Evidence of this can be found in the similarities between languages, writing systems, religions, art and architecture[35].

1.4.1. The Kingdoms of Mesopotamia

The Sumerian kingdom

While there is an element of uncertainty about the origins of the Sumerian people, there is some suggestion that they were the original people of Iraq, who existed in that region from about 4000 BC[36]. The Sumerians may have been local tribes that migrated from Arabia and mixed with the indigenous population, and went on to transform their new community into a sophisticated kingdom. Trade and agriculture flourished in the rich land of Sumer, partly as a result of the elaborate irrigation schemes which were developed to counter variations in seasonal rainfall[37]. The advanced engineering skills required to implement these schemes were complemented by the Sumerians' in-depth knowledge of mathematics and astronomy, which they used to predict the flooding times of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. The

[34] Woolf, G., 2005, p 57
[35] Van De Mieroop, M., 2004, pp 13, 32
[36] Anglin, J.P. & Hamblin, W.J.,1993, p16
[37] Anglin, J.P. & Hamblin, W.J.,1993, p18

Sumerians are thought to have invented the first written alphabet in around 4000 BC[38], allowing them to become the first civilisation to record events in a chronological order, leading to the development of a system of bureaucracy and the concept of governance. The Sumerians' professional clergymen had a fundamental role in society, and their theology extended to a belief in life after death which meant that people who died were buried with their possessions[39]. The Sumerians excelled in the arts, including music, literature and sculpture, with carvings adorning their palaces and places of worship[40]. (See map 4)

The Akkadian kingdom, consisting of settlers from the Arabian Peninsula, was established in 2334 BC and survived until 2191 BC[41]. The territory controlled by this successful empire grew to include not only southern Mesopotamia, but also northern Mesopotamia and the northern part of the Levant until the invasion of the Gutian, which put an end to the empire, allowing the Amorites from the south to infiltrate Mesopotamia. The Akkadians were very similar to the Sumerians and used the Sumerian written language, though they developed their own spoken version of the language. The Akkadians' military expansions spread their language through much of the old world, which may explain why the language spoken by Arabs before the introduction of Islam bore close resemblance to Akkadian. The Akkadians believed their king to be God's representative on earth, and the system of law and order which was devised to govern the people of this kingdom predated the famous laws of Hammurabi by three centuries[42]. (See map 4)

The early Babylonian kingdom existed from 1900 BC to 1595 BC, when it was brought to an end by the Hittites when they sacked Babylon[43]. It later revived itself, and the Neo-Babylonian (Chaldean) age took place from 612 BC to 539 BC. The Babylonians, who took Babel as their capital, are thought to have been tribes from the Arabian Peninsula who migrated towards the Levant and became Amorites. Some of them are then believed to have travelled east, where they put an end to the Sumerian and Akkadian kingdoms and unified the region, expanding upon the achievements of the previous kingdoms in terms of

[38] Haywood, J., 2001, p 1.10
[39] Anglin, J.P. & Hamblin, W.J.,1993, p18
[40] Woolf, G., 2005, p 88
[41] Anglin, J.P. & Hamblin, W.J.,1993, p19
[42] Woolf, G., 2005, pp 72, 74, 76
[43] Haywood, J., 2001, p 1.12

agriculture, trade and industry. The most famous Babylonian king was Hammurabi, who ruled from 1728 BC to 1686 BC, and whose subjects were closely governed by sophisticated legislation which consisted of over 300 laws[44]. Hammurabi was the first to implement the idea of inflicting a punishment to fit the severity of the crime[45]. His laws included such concepts as an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, and it was he who introduced civil citations and financial penalties. Under Hammurabi's reign, a son who beat his father or a surgeon who inflicted injury upon a patient would have his hands cut off, and crimes including heresy, witchcraft, bearing false witness, stealing from a place of worship, allowing slaves to escape, rape and banditry incurred the death penalty. Hammurabi was the first to implement the concepts of paying workers for their labour and training young people in crafts such as textiles and weaponry[46]. (See map 5)

All previously Sumerian cities flourished under the Babylonians, and became more sophisticated and elite. Similarly to the Akkadians, the Babylonians considered their king to be God's representative on earth, and they also worshipped the sun. In terms of science, mathematics and medicine, the Babylonians were extremely advanced. They were able to standardise units of measurement, and were the first to create a map of the zodiac and divide the calendar into months[47]. After the revival of the Babylonian kingdom in 612 BC, the famous King Nebuchadnezzar was able to unify the old kingdom, defeat the Assyrians and sack their capital, and also move into the Levant and part of Egypt. He defeated the Israelite kingdom in 586 BC and enslaved the Jewish people, taking them to Babel. In 539 BC, the Persian army, led by Cyrus the Great, was able to capture Babel, thereby putting an end to the Babylonian kingdom[48].

The Assyrian kingdom

The Assyrians were Amorite tribes who migrated from the Arabian Peninsula to the north of Mesopotamia, establishing Assur as their capital, in around 1900 BC[49]. In 1808 BC King Shamshi-Adad I seized the throne of Assur and expanded the kingdom into a state in 1749

[44] Woolf, G., 2005, pp 74
[45] Anglin, J.P. & Hamblin, W.J.,1993, p 21
[46] Woolf, G., 2005, pp 98
[47] Bravington, A., 2003, p 128
[48] Woolf, G., 2005, pp 13, 14
[49] Anglin, J.P. & Hamblin, W.J.,1993, p 35

BC. The Mittani annexed Assyria in 1550 BC, but were driven away in 1300 BC. The Assyrian kingdom, as a unified state, lasted until 612 BC, when its new capital, Ninevah, was sacked by Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar[50]. (See map 5)

The Assyrians established a very strong kingdom with a sophisticated military system[51] and, in 729 BC, at the height of their power, they were able to expand west towards the Levant and a large part of Egypt, and east all the way to Babel, which had previously been controlled by the Babylonians. The Assyrians utilised the scientific legacy of the Babylonians, and were pioneers in the development of military technology. They were the first to make armour and weapons out of iron, and their fast-moving chariots were used as a platform from which archers could rain massive numbers of arrows on their enemies. The Assyrians excelled more in agriculture than trade, especially in the construction of aqueducts. They invented the concepts of libraries and catalogues, and their art was distinguished by sculpted winged bulls and horses[52].

1.4.2. Kingdoms of the Levant

The Amorite kingdom

The Amorites, originally semi-nomadic tribes, were the earliest settlers from Arabia, having arrived in the Syrian Desert in around 2500 BC[53]. The tribes branched out, some remaining in the Levant and others migrating to Mesopotamia and mixing with the Sumerian people of southern Iraq. This mixed culture became the foundation of the Akkadians, the Babylonians and the Assyrians. The Amorites established their capital in the city of Mari on the Euphrates River, and were subject to continuous invasions by kingdoms such as the Hittites, Babylonians and Assyrians, who needed to move in and out of the Levant on their way to and from Egypt[54]. The kingdom was finally overthrown by Ramses III of Egypt in 1200 BC. The Amorites used the Sumerian system of handwriting, and the Amorite

[50] Bravington, A., 2003, p 113
[51] Woolf, G., 2005, p 106
[52] Bravington, A., 2003, pp 117, 118, 119
[53] Anglin, J.P. & Hamblin, W.J.,1993, p 20
[54] Bravington, A., 2003, p 40

language is the foundation of the Aramaic and Arabic languages. The Amorites worshipped many gods, and were proficient in weapon-making and textiles. (See map 5)

The Canaanite kingdom

The Canaanites also migrated from the Arabian Peninsula, and settled on the Syrian coast of the Mediterranean around 3000 BC[55]. They survived the invasion by the Hyksos warlords in 1674 BC, but the kingdom finally came to an end at the hands of the Egyptians in 1552 BC. Those who settled around the area which is now known as Lebanon became the Phoenicians. The Canaanites established different kingdoms around major cities, making the land of Western Syria and Palestine synonymous with the term "Canaan". Like the Amorite kingdom, the land of Canaan became a theatre for conflicts between warring kingdoms such as the Babylonians, Egyptians, Hittites, Hyksos, Israelites, Assyrians and Persians, and the territory finally fell under Roman control in 146 BC. (See map 6)

The Phoenician kingdom existed from 1500 BC to 330 BC, having been established by descendents of the Canaanites, and had its main cities in Sidon, Tyre and Byblos (See map 6). The Phoenicians were not only skilful shipbuilders, utilising Lebanese timber, but they were also able to navigate the seas with confidence. Their astrological knowledge allowed them to use the stars for night navigation, and they were therefore able to circumnavigate Africa in 600 BC. They established maritime colonies in Cyprus, Sardinia and Sicily and discovered Carthage in 1814 BC, and travelled to Cadiz in Spain and even as far as Celtic Britain in 450 BC. Credible archaeological data also suggests that they even ventured to the Azores and then to America[56] (See map 7). In addition to their maritime activities, the Phoenicians also established very sophisticated plantation and irrigation schemes. They were skilled at casting copper, bronze and other metals and at jewellery-making, and made glass and textiles with beautiful colours, especially red. The Phoenicians created the first phonetic alphabet and excelled in science, mathematics and astronomy. Such knowledge later found its way to ancient Greece as a result of trade between the nations. Phoenicians were pagan and believed in the same deity as the Canaanites, and their belief in life after death was probably adopted from the ancient Egyptians.

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[55] Hitti, P.K., 2002, p 9

[56] Anglin, J.P. & Hamblin, W.J.,1993, pp 31, 32

The Aramaean kingdom was established by tribes who migrated from the Arabian Peninsula around 1350 BC, and was overtaken by the Assyrians in 732 BC[57]. The Aramaeans built the city of Damascus, and later experienced continuous conflict with the Israelites in Palestine[58]. The Aramaic language was used in the Levant until the birth of Jesus, and was the foundation of both the Arabic and Jewish languages. The Aramaic people were skilful at facilitating inland trade and created a number of trade posts. They were pagan but worshipped nature, believing in gods of thunder, rain and fertility, and it is believed that the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus was originally an Aramaic temple for the worship of the god Edd.

The Israelite kingdom

The Israelites were nomadic Semitic tribes who originated in northern Mesopotamia around 1800 BC and later migrated to the fertile areas of the land of Canaan[59]. After a famine in the late 1700s BC, the tribes migrated to the Nile Delta and were semi-enslaved by the Egyptian pharaoh[60]. It is believed that in the 13th century BC, after persecution at the hands of Seti I and Ramses II, the prophet Moses led a group of Israelite slaves from Egypt to the Sinai Peninsula, where they established the faith of Judaism and became know as the Jewish people. The Hebrew tribes who infiltrated the Canaan land and managed to use warfare to displace the natives grew stronger with time and were able to defend themselves against their powerful Philistine neighbours. The kingdom of Israel was established under King Saul in 1025 BC, when the Hebrew tribes began a political federation which led to the development of a state[61]. Under King David, who reigned from 1000 BC to 961 BC, and King Solomon, who reigned from 961 BC to 922 BC, Israel became a recognised player in the politics of the Levant[62] (See map 8). In 928 BC, the kingdom suffered a division into two kingdoms, the northern kingdom of Israel, with its capital in Samaria, and the southern kingdom of Judah. During Assyrian King Shalmaneser V's campaign to conquer Egypt in 721 BC, the Israelite kingdom fell under his control, and almost its entire population was enslaved or displaced, and in 701 BC, Judah was also conquered by Assyria. Almost 100

[57] Van De Mieroop, M., 2004, p 211
[58] Hitti, P.K., 2002, p 11
[59] Barnavi, E., 1992, p 8
[60] Anglin, J.P. & Hamblin, W.J.,1993, p 33
[61] Barnavi, E., 1992, p 15
[62] Haywood, J., 2001, p 114

years later, when the Egyptians managed to expel the Assyrians and force them back to the Levant, Judah fell under the control of the Egyptians, who ruled from 609 BC to 605 BC. In 586 BC, King Nebuchadnezzar of the Neo-Babylonian dynasty defeated the Assyrians. He reoccupied the area, enslaved the Jews of Jerusalem and sent them to Babylon. Cyrus the Great of Persia captured Babylon in 539 BC, after which time the enslaved Jewish people were returned to Israel[63].

Little is known about what happened to the Jewish people when the area fell under the control of Alexander the Great in 334 BC. However, in 140 BC, an independent Jewish state emerged under Simon the Hasmonean. The kingdom became a Roman protectorate in 63 BC, and Herod, who reigned from 37 BC to 4 BC, divided it in his will among his three sons. The Jewish people revolted unsuccessfully from AD 66 to AD 73 after their temples had been destroyed, and following their failed last stand at Masada, they became enslaved and persecuted by the Romans. From this time on, the Jewish people were dispersed across North Africa, Europe and Persia[64].

1.4.3. The Kingdoms of Northern Arabia

The kingdom of Palmyra

The city of Tadmur, which was later named Palmyra, meaning "the city of palm trees", by Alexander the Great, existed halfway between the Euphrates River in the east and Damascus in the west[65] (See map 9). Blessed with its own source of water in a very arid terrain, Palmyra became a resting place for many Arab caravans in around 1100 BC, although it is thought to have been known about from as early as 1800 BC. Palmyra's wealth grew as a result of its position at the start of the Western trade route, and the kingdom became a cultured civilisation which combined Greek, Syrian and Parthian elements[66]. AD 130 to 270 was an era of luxurious extravagance for the Palmyrenes, whose

[63] Barnavi, E., 1992, pp 21, 23, 25, 29
[64] Barnavi, E., 1992, pp 35, 47, 51, 52
[65] Anglin, J.P. & Hamblin, W.J., 1993, p 223
[66] Hitti, P.K., 2002, pp 74, 76

international trade now consisted of textiles, glass and leatherwork, together with the usual spices from as far east as China[67].

The kingdom of Palmyra was mostly able to avoid the conflicts that raged between the empires, but it became a Roman protectorate in around 60 BC. The Palmyrenes fought wars for their Roman allies, and Palmyra's first ruler, Odenathus, was rewarded with the title of Sheikh of Palmyra for assisting the Romans in their war against the Persians. The Palmyrenes grew in power and influence, and after the death of Odenathus, his widow Zenobia pressed the kingdom's boundaries ever forward into Asia Minor and Egypt. One of her sons was proclaimed King of Egypt and issued coins bearing his own head and omitting that of Emperor Aurelian. This was the final straw for Aurelian, who destroyed Palmyra in AD 273, taking Zenobia to Rome as a prisoner and leaving the city in ruins[68].

The Nabatean kingdom

The Nabateans were tribes who migrated from the Arabian Peninsula to northern Arabia around 600 BC[69], establishing Petra as a trading post which linked Yemen, Egypt, the Levant and Mesopotamia[70] (See map 9). As Petra became more prosperous and successful as an enterprising trading emirate, it grew in power, strength and influence, and managed to operate independently of the troubled spots of the Fertile Crescent. The Nabateans had good relationships with the Babylonians, the Assyrians and even the Egyptians, and became a successful kingdom[71]. They were skilful craftsmen, especially in pottery and ceramics, and demonstrated their extraordinary skill by carving the city of Petra out of stone. They enjoyed the arts, and built an amphitheatre for the general entertainment of the people, their style of architecture being reminiscent of the Hellenistic style. Aramaic was their main language, and they worshipped a number of pagan deities, many of their gods having very similar names to those being worshipped in Mecca. Alexander the Great and his predecessors tried to overtake the Nabatean kingdom, but were unsuccessful because its location, in the desert among the terrain, gave it protective cover. The Nabateans had their

[67] Nicolle, D., 2004, p 10
[68] Hitti, P.K., 2002, p 75
[69] Anglin, J.P. & Hamblin, W.J., 1993, p 222
[70] Bravington, A., 2003, p 192
[71] Hitti, P.K., 2002, p 67

first contact with Rome in 65 BC. In an effort to reduce Rome's import costs, Roman Emperor Augustus attempted to put an end to the Arabian trade routes, souring relations between the Romans and the Nabateans. The Nabatean kingdom finally fell at the hands of Roman Emperor Trajan in AD 106[72].

1.4.4. The Kingdoms of Yemen

The Ma'in kingdom

The people of ancient Yemen established three well-known kingdoms sharing the same roots. The first was the Ma'in, which was founded in around 1300 BC and was taken over by the Sabaeans in around 700 BC, the capital of which was al-Qarn, southeast of Sana'a, near Miswar[73] (See map 10). Rather than having a centralised administration, the Ma'in kingdom gave a great deal of autonomy to its provinces, which were thought best able to run their own affairs, making the Ma'ins the first to have used the idea of decentralisation to form a confederation. A class system operated within the kingdom, and while women were emancipated, the middle classes and aristocrats were largely supported by the labour of slaves. The Ma'in depended upon trade and agriculture, and therefore developed inland and maritime trade routes linking Africa, Egypt and Greece, and the scents and perfumes they produced were used in places of worship in Ancient Egypt and Babylon. These trade links may well be the explanation for the remarkable similarities in the faiths and languages of the Ma'in and the Babylonians. The Ma'ins' proficiency with the written alphabet of their Semitic language allowed them to formalise deals and contracts, which contributed to the kingdom's economic success.

The Sabaean kingdom

Most historians suggest that the second kingdom, Saba, was established around 900 BC and collapsed at the hands of the Himyārites in around 200 BC[74]. However, biblical references indicate that the Queen of Sheba, Balqis, paid a visit to King Solomon of Israel, who reigned from 960 to 922 BC, which would therefore suggest that the kingdom was established in around 1000 BC. Ma'rib, the capital of Saba (east of Sana'a), was the

[72] Hitti, P.K., 2002, p 68
[73] Hitti, P.K., 2002, p 42
[74] Hitti, P.K., 2002, p 49

terminus of the trade route connecting the Mediterranean ports northwards to Petra (See map 10). The Sabaeans built towns, roads, and temples, and are famous for their construction of the great Ma'rib Dam, the existence of which was proof of a highly advanced society. The dam was a quarter of a mile long and 53-feet high, with a 200-inch thick base, and irrigated about 25,000 acres, supporting 50,000 people. When the Ma'rib Dam broke following two serious bursts, and flooded the fertile land and villages, an event recorded in the Koran (Surah 34.16), some of the people of Yemen decided to migrate north to cities such as Yathrib (Medina). This relocation probably also accounts for the early settlements found in Abyssinia, the earliest documentation of which is during the 1st century after Christ. Prior to this time the maritime route to India remained in the hands of the Sabaeans, though the Axumites later established themselves on the Arabian Coast of the Red Sea, where they intermittently controlled the South Arabian routes[75].

The Himyārite kingdom was established, with its capital in Zafar, 100 kilometres south of Sana, around 200 BC, and the kingdom was invaded by the Axumites in AD 340 (See map 10). The Himyārite language and script were extremely similar to those of the Sabaeans, who, like them, traded in frankincense and myrrh which were much sought after by the Romans. The Romans attempted to invade the Himyārites in 24 BC in an effort to destroy their trading activities, but were unsuccessful. The Himyārites embraced Christianity and Judaism against paganism, which was widespread in Arabia; indeed, one Himyārite king tried to convert all of his subjects to Judaism. His response to their refusal was to burn all the Christians, prompting the Axumites to invade Yemen in support of Christianity. There were continuous invasions by the Axumites, the last one in AD 570 by King Abrahah, who unsuccessfully attempted to destroy the Ka'ba in Mecca in order to put an end to paganism in Arabia and to enforce Christianity. The Himyārites were able, with the help of the Sassanians, to put an end to the Axumite influence in Arabia until the birth of Islam[76].

[75] Hitti, P.K., 2002, pp 50, 54
[76] Hitti, P.K., 2002, pp 55, 62, 65

1.5. From Persian to Sassanian Empire

In around the 7th century BC, in the area known today as Iran, the Persian Empire grew out of the Achaemenid kingdom by modelling itself on the infrastructure of the advanced ancient empires of Mesopotamia such as the Akkadian, Babylonian and Assyrian[77]. It expanded to become the largest empire in the ancient world, with a vast territory extending as far east as the Hindu Kush Mountains and as far west as Asia Minor and Arabia, and occasionally even reaching as far as Egypt. The empire was to become economically and socially superior to the Greek Empire, because it managed to bring the Greek and Persian cultures together, and allowed the Greek and Jewish religions to coexist with Zoroastrianism. This ethnic diversity encouraged the development of efficient trade routes from areas as far flung as China, Europe and North Africa. (See map 11)

By the 4th century BC, Macedonia had become a strong force in the west, challenging first Greece, then lands further east. In 334 BC, Alexander the Great of Macedonia defeated the Persian army, and the empire collapsed when its capital, Persepolis, was looted and destroyed[78] (See map 12). Alexander's military successes granted him mythical status in the west, but the Persian people perceived him as little more than a barbarian who was incapable of appreciating the civilized greatness of the Persian Empire. Alexander left a legacy of weak dynasties, such as the Seleucid and Parthian dynasties, to rule Persia. During this dark time, known as the Hellenistic period because of the strong Greek cultural influence on Persia, anti-Greek sentiments arose. By the 3rd century AD, the Sassanian Empire emerged and Persian culture and the Zoroastrian religion were restored and Greek, Jewish and later Christian ideologies in the region were overridden. A new central government was established in Ctesiphon (south of Baghdad), and Ardashir I claimed the first Sassanian throne in AD 224[79].

The Sassanian Empire was almost constantly at war with the neighbouring Roman Empire to the west. Ardashir's son, Shapur I, even captured the Roman Emperor, Valerian, for a

[77] Anglin, J.P. & Hamblin, W.J., 1993, p 39
[78] Haywood, J., 2001, p 2.09
[79] Anglin, J.P. & Hamblin, W.J., 1993, p 159

time in AD 260[80] (See map 13). The animosity between the two empires was exacerbated in the 4th century AD, when the Roman Emperor, Constantine I, converted to Christianity, and later, Theodosius I officially made Christianity the official state religion. After that, relations between the two empires took on an increasingly religious aspect, as the Roman Empire sought to protect all Christians outside its borders, particularly those under Sassanian rule. The Christians in the Sassanian Empire had not previously faced persecution for their religion, since they were mostly Nestorian Christians, a different branch of Christianity than that practised in the Roman Empire. For that reason the Sassanians viewed their Christians not as following the religion of the enemy, but rather another Persian religion[81]. Still, the Sassanian Christians were the first to be suspected of political disloyalty whenever the empire came into conflict with the Romans after Constantine's time.

After 50 years of peace, Khusrau II (r. AD 590-628) resumed hostilities with the neighbouring Byzantine Empire, the successor to the Roman[82]. He rapidly expanded into Byzantine lands, capturing Jerusalem in AD 612 and Alexandria in AD 619, while placing Constantinople, the Byzantine capital, under siege. The Byzantines responded by using the Armenians to stage a surprise attack through the Caucasus into the northern frontiers of the Sassanian Empire. They looted Ctesiphon in AD 627, and Khusrau II was killed while fleeing the city. There were eleven more rulers in the following ten last years of the Empire, but after Khusrau II, the Sassanians became more centralised, grew more inefficient and lost their advantage. (See map 23)

1.6. From Roman to Byzantine Empire

In around 500BC, the Roman Empire evolved from an absolute monarchy into a sophisticated empire, developing a new concept of governance, which, in addition to the emperor, featured a senate made up of the elite citizens of Rome, and incorporating a huge army of professional soldiers[83]. By the 3rd century BC, Rome had completed its conquest of

[80] Haywood, J., 2001, p 2.11
[81] Smart, N., 1999, p 170
[82] Anglin, J.P. & Hamblin, W.J., 1993, p 160
[83] Anglin, J.P. & Hamblin, W.J., 1993, p 112

the Italian peninsula, and embarked on military campaigns against its regional adversaries in Europe and North Africa. The Punic Wars (264–201 BC) brought the first major Roman victory over the Carthaginians, virtually turning the Mediterranean into a Roman sea[84]. Roman territory subsequently came to include Spain, North Africa, Greece, Asia Minor and Egypt. (See map 13)

Beginning in the 3rd century BC, the Roman republic underwent significant restructuring in an effort to address regional challenges. The most important change was the adoption of Christianity by Emperor Constantine I[85]. During his reign, all non-Romans, the majority of whom were considered barbarians, had not only to be defeated militarily in order to bring them to civilized order, but also had to be converted to Christianity. It is worth noting that Roman Christianity was then a mixture of paganism and ancient Greek mythologies, mixed with selected practices of the Christian faith. In AD 330 Emperor Constantine rebuilt the ancient Greek city of Byzantium on the Bosporus, renaming it Constantinople, and establishing it as the principal capital of the Roman Empire, thus initiating the eastward shift of power from Rome. (See map 14)

When Emperor Theodosius I (r. 379-395) decided in AD 395 to assign his two sons to run the united republic, one ruling the eastern side and the other the western, he unintentionally encouraged the separation of the empire[86]. When the western side fell to the Germanic invaders in the late 5th century AD, the eastern side, with Constantinople as a flourishing capital, became known as the eastern Roman Empire. Constantinople later became a leading city of the eastern Orthodox Church, widening the division with the western Catholic Church based in Rome. When the western empire collapsed in AD 476, Constantinople became the capital city of a new empire, and was named after the ancient Greek city of Byzantium. This empire was able to bring under its control most of Asia Minor, the Balkans, the east coast of the Mediterranean, Egypt and parts of North Africa[87].

[84] Haywood, J., 2001, p 2.12
[85] Haywood, J., 2001, p 2.15
[86] Anglin, J.P. & Hamblin, W.J., 1993, p 191
[87] Cameron, A., 2003, p 12

1.7. Religion

Since man first developed an awareness of his environment and his place within it, and recognised the limitations of his ability to alter or influence his own fate, he has been seeking explanations about his existence. Faced with the unknown and recognising the irreversible processes of life and death, man has continuously sought answers about how the universe operates[88]. Of course, the more man thinks, the more uncertain he becomes, and it is only with the concept of faith that he has been able to psychologically motivate himself to strive and move forward. Even in its earliest manifestations, the concept of faith, as well as apparently offering reassurance and protection to the individual, also had the advantage of grouping people together and simplifying the task of survival[89]. Especially when he first learned how to settle in environments which were conducive to his wellbeing and development, man sought to protect himself and his interests from bad luck, the forces of nature, and enemies. As a result of his inability to find a rational explanation for the adverse realities of life, he began to think that a supreme being must be in control of his destiny. In order to avoid sickness, disease, misfortune, floods, famine and other catastrophes, man ventured to pay homage to this supreme force, either by denying himself the fruits of life, by working harder, or by taking certain objects as icons of worship[90].

1.7.1. Paganism

It is believed that this is how the concepts of religion and sacrifice were born in Arabia and elsewhere (See map 15). Polytheistic paganism, one of the first steps in the evolution of the concept of religion, was born out of man's belief that idols made by him, created through divine guidance, could mediate between himself and the supreme powers, and under this ideology, man sought or created gods and idols to which he could pray for such things as love, fertility, achievement and protection. The works of art they created as idols would sometimes be carved in the image of prophets or saints or other good people. In addition to these manmade idols, early pagans might also have worshipped one or more of any number of elements or objects, including the sun or moon or other stars, or even unusual stones.

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[88] Gellman, RM and Hartman, T., 2002, p 31
[89] Smart, N., 1999, p 20
[90] Smart, N., 1999, p 96

They may have given praise to the life-giving sea or to the destructive power of fire, or to animals, which supported and sustained the people. Other pagans developed a concept of animism, in which they worshipped their own perception of the spirits, such as their own ancestral spirits, which were thought to eventually become one with the forces of nature[91].

Paganism may differ according to the culture in which it is being practised, but all pagan religions share a number of elements. The first of these is the concept of polytheism, under which it is believed that there is a multitude of gods, each overseeing specific activities[92]. All practitioners of paganism also believe in the deification of their king or ruler, who is seen as god's representative on earth and who must therefore be obeyed without question. Sacrifice is also essential to pagan belief - the destruction of the very thing that you seek to protect, be it plant, animal or human, is thought to be the ultimate way of paying homage to the gods and gaining their favour. As the timing of sacrifices is determined by a religious calendar, the observation of pagan rituals enforces a certain discipline within a community. Ritualism is central to paganism, and many pagan ceremonies, including symbolic marriage, sexual orgies and dancing, have a highly ritualistic element, and practising such rituals is thought to bond the community. All pagans have a concept of syncretism, or recognition of the existence of other pagan faiths and open-mindedness to the possibility of modifying your own perception to accommodate the beliefs of others to suit a place or location. Pagan faiths also share elements of belief about the concepts of salvation, immortality and resurrection, although the adoption of these beliefs differs enormously from one place to another.

It should be remembered that paganism was, to many, extremely lucrative. Under paganism, faith became a business and the production of idols a booming enterprise, its growth depending upon the manipulation of the vulnerable and the naïve. As pagan believers were convinced that men are not equal and therefore the statues of their gods were not equal, religion became a tool of the rich and powerful. There were gods of the rich and gods of the poor, and those who could afford to spend a fortune to magnify their gods were thought to be in a better position to alter or influence their own fate. The replacement of

[91] Smart, N., 1999, p 171
[92] Nicolle, D., 2004, p 26

paganism with the concept of the one unseen god must therefore have been an extremely contentious proposition.

Like humanity itself, man's concept of religion has evolved and developed over time, growing from a simplistic perception of gods to a sophisticated ideological concept thought to reflect people's social characteristics, identity and way of life. When man finally realised that manmade objects were unlikely to have any significant bearing on his future, he began to think of alternatives to paganism. In around 1700 BC, the prophet Abraham suggested that man did not need an agent to mediate on his behalf with the supreme powers, and called people to worship one supreme invisible god. He believed that people should use their conscience to differentiate between good and evil rather than paying penalties to purify themselves. The concept of monotheism thereafter became the foundation of the religions of certain Semitic tribes such as the Jews and the Christians and later the Muslims[93].

1.7.2. Judaism

According to biblical history, the religion of Judaism was born in the 13th century BC when the prophet Moses led a group of Hebrew slaves from Egypt to the Sinai Peninsula, saving them from the injustices of the Egyptian pharaoh Ramses II. Like Noah and Abraham before him, the Prophet Moses was thought to have been granted the ability to perform miracles to prove God's existence and demonstrate that he was his true prophet. The Israelites believed that Moses had an encounter on Mount Sinai with the supreme god, who commanded him to lead his people from slavery and bondage into salvation by observing God's Ten Commandments, which became the foundation of the Hebrew Bible eight centuries later[94]. Judaism embraced the Prophet Abraham's concept of monotheism, focusing on the one god who was thought to be eternal and the creator of the universe, and who maintained cosmic order and human morality through the application of traditional, judicious rules, which were seen as supreme and absolute. Judaism then expanded upon this basic ideology by adding civil laws aimed at organising the relationships between people

[93] Barnavi, E., 1992, p 4
[94] Barnes, I., 2006, p 35

on the basis of morality and justice. Under Judaism, every man was thought to be responsible for using logic and reason to worship God and follow his rules, and for guiding others in the hope of offering them the promise of divine protection[95].

When Judaism emerged, it was considered to be exclusive to the Hebrew tribes, who thought that by observing Moses' Ten Commandments they would become the chosen people[96] (See map 8). The Hebrews believed that God assigned them the duty of guiding all of humanity away from immorality, and that they could fulfil the responsibilities of this momentous task through the exclusive worship of God. Judaism was similar to other religions in that it believed that the earth would one day be populated by evil men, and that a deliverer or a messiah would come to judge men according to their sins, rescuing true believers and rewarding them with eternal paradise, and condemning sinners to hell. The Jews believed in ritual, pilgrimage and sacrifice, and followed a very strict code of personal conduct and dietary laws. They believed in the scholarly religious elite, the rabbis, whose sole objective was to ensure that the Jewish people adhered to, observed and practised God's rituals, worshipping God in a synagogue on the Sabbath day, which is thought to be the day upon which Moses allowed the Hebrews to rest when they were building the pharaohs' temples and pyramids.

The Hebrew Bible was completed in the 5th century BC and revised in the 1st century AD to take the form in which it still exists today[97]. It is divided into three parts – the law (Torah), the prophets (Nevi'in) and the writings (Ketuvin) and, written in the Aramaic language[98] and later translated into Hebrew, it is thought to form the essential written directives, history and law of the Jewish people. The writings consist of historical works, sacred and non-religious poetry and wisdom literature, as well as prophesies of things expected to happen in the future. The Hebrew Bible is a world literary masterpiece which addresses the fundamental questions of the purpose of life. It influenced the Christian version of the Old Testament and ultimately the New Testament, a fact that still directly impacts upon the evolution of the western perception of Christianity.

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[95] Smart, N., 1999, pp 116, 118, 120
[96] Farrington, K., 2006, p 12, 14
[97] Anglin, J.P. & Hamblin, W.J., 1993, p 34
[98] Hitti, P.K., 2002, p 40

1.7.3. Zoroastrianism

The inception of Zoroastrianism, which became the principle religion of the Persian Empire in the 6th century BC, could be seen as another step in the evolution of the concept of religion[99] (See map 11). Zoroastrians believed in one supreme invisible god, and worshipped their king as God's representative on earth. The supreme god was thought to oversee the constant battles between Ahuramazda, the god of goodness and light, and Ahriman, the god of evil. While the pagans worshipped the actual elements of fire, air, soil and water, the Zoroastrians worshipped the elements as evidence of the existence of the one god, and praised them out of respect and appreciation[100]. The founder of Zoroastrianism, Zarathustra, proclaimed himself to be the prophet of Ahuramazda, and based his religion on the revelations sent by the supreme god through the holy books Gathas and Avesta[101].

Other revolutionary ideas of this religion were the concepts of penance and codes of conduct. The Zoroastrians believed that victory over evil would lead them to resurrection and paradise. They also believed that a messiah or saviour would bring people redemption from sin, and that those who supported the god of evil over the god of good would be cast into hell. It is evident, then, that many Zoroastrian beliefs are shared by the religions of Judaism and Christianity.

When the Persian Emperor Achaemenid adopted Zoroastrianism as the official Persian religion, it was still a minority religion, limited to the emperor's Persian subjects[102]. Even when the religion grew to accommodate people other than Persians, its expansion was extremely limited. Following the defeat of the Persian Empire by Alexander the Great, and the Hellenistic period which followed, the subsequent Sassanian Empire evolved and readopted Zoroastrianism as the state religion. As the religion granted absolute power to the Sassanian king, he expelled or enslaved anyone who failed to respect either him or the official faith of the state. Zoroastrianism became a pretext for ideological warfare against

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[99] Woolf, G., 2005, p 124
[100] Anglin, J.P. & Hamblin, W.J., 1993, p 42
[101] Smart, N., 1999, p108
[102] Farrington, K., 2006, p 156

the Byzantines, and those they persecuted, whether pagans, Jews or Christians, were eventually allowed to stay in the Sassanian Empire as political or religious refugees.

1.7.4. Christianity

Christianity emerged after the birth of Jesus of Nazareth in Bethlehem at the turn of the 1st century AD[103]. The concept of the Christian faith as an ideology has undergone three major evolutionary phases. The first centres on the birth, teachings and death of Jesus Christ, around each of which lies an air of controversy and debate. The second is the existence and content of the New Testament, which differs from the Aramaic Hebrew Bible in that it was written in the Greek Latin language by Jesus' apostles[104], and is thought to demonstrate how religion's vision and direction changed from the teachings of the Old Testament as a result of the life of Christ. The third phase of the Christian faith began when the Roman Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity with the intention of making it the republic's official state religion[105]. (See maps 13,14)

Christians believe that Jesus' birth was marked by a number of signs which indicated that he was indeed the promised messiah for whom the people of the time had been waiting. On the night of his birth, an exceptionally bright star, known as the Star of Bethlehem, is said to have shone over his birthplace. The appearance of this star had been predicted by three kings thereafter known as the Three Wise Men, who each individually followed the star and, meeting without prior arrangement, went to celebrate the birth of the newborn child and offer him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Christians believe that Jesus' mother Mary experienced a virgin conception, although there were those at the time who cast doubt on this claim and questioned Mary's virtue and morality. Joseph, a Canaanite carpenter, later married Mary as a sign of his belief in her and his faith in her explanation of the conception, and accepted Jesus as his foster son. Muslims also believe that Jesus' conception was remarkable and that Joseph was not the biological father. Joseph' actions did not quell all suspicion and questions about the conception eventually coincided with Joseph being made aware of the threat to Jesus from the Roman King Herod. Herod ruled

[103] Barnes, I., 2006, p 274
[104] Van De Mieroop, M., 2004, p 209
[105] Smart, N., 1999, pp114, 138, 140

over the Levant and all the tribes within it, including the Israelites, and was threatened by prophesies about the birth of a deliverer for the Jewish people, so the family were forced to flee to Memphis in Egypt, where Mary and Joseph are said to have had another four children. They returned to Nazareth when they felt that their lives were no longer in danger[106].

Most references agree that Jesus was raised in the Abrahamic monotheistic religious tradition. Some texts suggest that he may have been brought up in the Jewish faith and that Mary was descended from the prophet Jacob, making her Jewish[107]. Islamic belief on the subject of the genealogy of Jesus differs to that believed by Christians and Jews. Jews and Christians believe that Joseph was from Judea and a descendent of David and that little is known about Mary's genealogy, whereas Muslims believe that it was Mary who was descended from a line of prophets going back to David[108]. Others argue that the family was not Jewish but rather members of a local tribe such as the Canaans, they spoke Aramaic and not Hebrew and that Jesus was raised outside of the Jewish faith in Egypt. This uncertainty about whether or not Jesus was raised in the Jewish tradition raises the question of how he was treated by the Jewish community. Given Joseph's lineage, Jesus could not have been considered fully Jewish, so was he accepted by the community or was he considered inferior? If so, did this attitude influence the way the Jews received his message?

While little is known about Jesus' early childhood, the Bible says that during a visit to Jerusalem at the age of twelve, he was separated from his family and later found in a temple speaking to the priests, who saw his level of understanding as being far beyond that which could be expected from a child of his age. He is thought to have practised carpentry until after his baptism by John the Baptist, at which time he began his public ministry of preaching, teaching and healing. According to the Bible, Jesus performed various miracles in the course of his ministry, including walking on water, turning water into wine, healing people of incurable diseases and raising the dead[109]. There is said to have been a great similarity between the miracles Jesus performed and those performed by the prophet Elijah.

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[106] Barnes, I., 2006, pp 277, 278
[107] Hitti, P.K., 2002, p 125
[108] Trigilio Jr. Rev. J. & Brighenti, Rev. K., 2005, pp 74, 75
[109] Barnes, I., 2006, p 286

Jesus did not prescribe to specific laws about dress, diet, or methods of worship, but rather preached a message of peace, love and tolerance which was aimed at healing the wounds of a society that had been ravaged by centuries of violence and war. It is thought that Jesus believed in the miraculous nature of his own conception, but there is no decisive evidence to prove whether he believed that God had chosen him to be his own and only son and worthy of worship in his own right. Being of controversial birth himself may have made Jesus more sensitive to the misfortunes of others, and his nonconformity made his words particularly inspirational to the weak and destitute. The Roman power of the time, however, felt threatened by the potentially disruptive influence of his teachings. While his ideas of peace and pacifism were seen as a threat to the empire's ability to recruit people to fight within its armies, his belief in the one god separated his followers from the Roman state religion and therefore diminished their loyalty to the Roman Empire.

Jesus' message also differed to that delivered by Moses to the Israelites in that it was addressed to all of mankind, not to a specific tribe or chosen people[110]. It had been predicted in the Hebrew Bible that the Israelites would be sent a messiah who would deliver them from political and military oppression and restore them to the status of God's chosen people which they felt was rightly theirs. The theme of Jesus' preaching was, "Repent, for the kingdom of God has drawn near," which the Jews initially understood to be a promise that the Israelite kingdom would be freed from Roman rule and restored to a state of independence and power. However, when it became clear that Jesus' aim was not to bring political or military salvation to the Jews, their disappointment grew into resentment and hostility, and Jesus was accused of being an impostor. Christians believe that Jesus was eventually betrayed by one of his followers, Judas Iscariot, who led him to be captured by the Roman authorities. In AD 33, three years after his ministry had begun, Jesus was captured and accused of blasphemy and sedition against the Roman state. He was publicly tortured and humiliated and finally crucified[111].

The story of Jesus' death is at least as controversial as the story of his life. Christians believe that Jesus died on the Cross and was buried, and that after three days he was

[110] Smart, N., 1999, pp136
[111] Anglin, J.P. & Hamblin, W.J., 1993, p 143

resurrected, rising body and soul into Heaven. This is said to provide an explanation for the disappearance of his body from the tomb in which he was buried, and is believed by Christians to have taken place so that Jesus would be ready to descend once more when the time came for the prophesied Second Coming. However, there is some debate as to whether Jesus was in fact resurrected, or whether he was simply resuscitated, and theories abound as to what may have become of him after his resuscitation and subsequent escape. One theory suggests that he fled the Roman Empire via the Euphrates River and the Arabian Gulf, making a successful escape to Kashmir, where he had a family, eventually died and was buried in a temple which is still in existence today. This theory is supported by archaeological findings made in the Gulf and in the tombs and shrines in Kashmir where he is thought to have finally rested. Another theory, believed by the Knights Templar, suggests that Jesus was helped by his followers to board a ship bound for France, where he married Mary Magdalene, had a family and finally died. Whatever the reality of his life and eventual death may be, Jesus is widely regarded as one of the most important people who ever lived.

Jesus' moral teachings inspired his twelve companions, known as the Apostles, and after his death one of the Apostles, a converted Hellenised Jew called Paul, began to discuss the doctrine of Christianity among the Greeks and Romans. Despite not believing in the divinity of Jesus, Paul later became an important figure in laying the foundation for the transformation of Christianity from a minority Jewish sect to a world religion and, by AD, 70 Christianity's separation from Judaism was complete[112]. Perhaps the most significant development in the evolution of Christianity as we know it came about at the hands of the Roman Emperor Constantine. Because of their refusal to pay homage to the state gods of the Roman Empire, early Christians were punished by the Romans. However, in AD 312, Constantine saw that the Roman Empire needed to adopt an ideology for which its citizens would be prepared to fight and die in its longstanding conflict with the Persian Empire, which was predominantly Zoroastrian[113]. Constantine saw the modern and enlightened religion of Christianity as the perfect tool of empire and embraced the faith as the official state religion, although he recognised the need to customise it to accommodate Greek

[112] Barnes, I., 2006, p 302
[113] Barnes, I., 2006, p 333

superstition and Roman paganism[114]. It was under Constantine, therefore, that the concept of the Holy Trinity, that is, the existence of God as comprised of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, was adapted from the Hellenistic tradition. The idea of the divinity of Jesus was also adopted by Christians during this time, as was the symbol of the Cross as a focal point of the Christian faith. Christians thereafter came to believe that God had created the Roman Empire for the purpose of spreading Christianity. The Roman Empire also reinterpreted the idea of the anti-Christ which had been discussed in the New Testament's Book of Revelations, and used it to suggest that anyone who disagreed with the concepts of Christianity could be punished for blasphemy. This gave the religion an added political dimension, and by the 6th century many Jews and Christians who did not wholly believe in the Greek and Roman ideas of Christianity were persecuted by the Roman-Byzantine Empire and forced to seek refuge in the Sassanian Empire (See map 15).

Christianity has evolved to accommodate a number of doctrines, ideas and practices. The Christian Bible includes the Old Testament, which is the Hebrew Bible, although the Hebrew Bible was believed to have been originally written in Aramaic in the 5th century AD and was revised in the 1st century AD, and it is not clear how much difference exists between the original Aramaic text and the Hebrew translation[115]. The New Testament, which was added to the Bible in AD 75, consists of 27 separate works, including the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, which are a narrative of their respective ministries, 21 epistles, which were written by various authors, and an Apocalyptic prophecy. Christians believe in prophesies and miracles, and that God is able to directly intervene in the present and future. They also believe in the exclusivity of Christianity, which means that once a Christian you cannot embrace any other faith. They believe it to be their religious duty to preach the teachings of Jesus, and to worship in Church on Sunday, the day upon which God is said to have rested when he created the Earth. Christians believe themselves to be bonded by a Christian brotherhood, its members bound by respect and care for each other. There is an elite order in the Christian faith, and the objective of the priesthood is to preach the faith and ensure that the community abides by

[114] Cameron, A., 2003, p 141
[115] Smart, N., 1999, p 138

the word of the Lord. Christians believe in the promise of eternal life after death on Judgement Day, and in the concepts of heaven and hell.

1.8. Arabia

The Arab people of the 6th century inhabited not only the whole of the Arabian Peninsula, but also a large part of the Fertile Crescent, existing between the spheres of influence of the Sassanian and Byzantine Empires. Although at the time they did not play a major role in the East-West politics of the great powers, they nevertheless facilitated trade between the continents[116].

Arabia was not perceived by the major powers as an area of any immediate strategic importance, as its harsh environment made it unattractive for large-scale agriculture or small craft industries. The Arabs who populated the peninsula mostly lived around its outskirts, between the seas and the high ground, where trade and agriculture could be supported. The majority of the heartland was impenetrable to everyone but the hardiest of tribes, who were capable of crossing the desert and finding water, although even they could do so only during certain months of the year. The nomadic tribes, who lived on the perimeters of cities, constituted a small percentage of the total population. The Arabs enjoyed a unified culture, speaking the same language and with an oral literary tradition. The region was a major centre for ancient civilisation. It had been exposed to different religions and was in contact with most of the nations and kingdoms of the known world[117].

1.8.1. The Settled Arab

The southern tribes of Arabia

The Himyārites and the Khanates, who populated Yemen, are said to be descendents of the oldest civilisation of Arabia, the Sabaean, and are able to trace their Semitic ancestry back to the prophet Abraham through his son Ishmael (See map 16). The south of Arabia was the cradle of Arab civilisation - indeed, the Arabic language has its origins in the language of

[116] Nicolle, D., 2004, pp 8-11
[117] Anglin, J.P. & Hamblin, W.J., 1993, p 221

the Yemeni tribes - and it was only after the collapse of the great Marib Dam that Arabs were compelled to move north[118]. The high levels of rainfall and the fertile nature of the southern lands of Arabia, where the Garden of Eden is believed to have existed, enabled the Himyārites and Khanates to establish a dedicated agricultural community which still thrives today, with commodities such as coffee being cultivated there. In addition to their agricultural pursuits, the Yemeni tribes also played a very important role in trading with the African and Indian continents, allowing Arab caravans to travel north to link with trade routes to Asia and Europe. Perhaps as a result of the influence of such itinerant communities, Southern Arabia was a multi-religious region, with Jews, Christians and pagans and an influence from the Christian Abyssinians. The area was regularly invaded by Axumite kings, who were repelled by local kings with the assistance of their Sassanian allies. The last unsuccessful Axumite invasion was by King Abrahah in 570, when he decided to march to Mecca to destroy Ka'ba, as he felt it necessary to rid Arabia of paganism.

The central tribes of Arabia, who originated in Yemen, can be divided into three groups according to their geographical location (See map 16). The Hijazi tribes, who lived between the high ground and the western coast of Arabia on the Red Sea, were comprised, from south to north, of the Hamdan, al-Ḥārith, Tihama, Kinana, Thaqīf, Qurayysh, Hudhayl, Khuzā'ah and Juhainah. The Bahraini tribes, who lived on the eastern shores of Arabia on the Arabian Gulf were made up, from south to north, of the Azd, Yamama, Kilab and Bakr. The Najdi tribes, which lived in and around central Arabia, consisted of the Kindah, Murad, Madhhij, Hanifa, Fazārah, Asad, Tamin, Tayyi, Kalb and Taghlib.

The Hijazi tribes, who were primarily dependent upon trade and occasional agriculture, were relatively wealthy, though not as wealthy as the Yemeni tribes, nor as sophisticated as the Gassan and the Lakhmīd tribes of the north in terms of power and splendour. These tribes existed on the western route from Yemen to Syria, and therefore eventually came in contact with the Byzantine Empire. The tribes were religiously diverse, with a large Christian community in the al-Ḥārith tribe near Najran, Jewish tribes in Yathrib (Medina), and paganism centred on Mecca.

[118] Nicolle, D., 2004, pp 13, 16

As for the Bahraini tribes, the weather conditions did not permit an agriculture-based economy, but they served an important role in facilitating trade from Yemen to Persia and India, and they acted as a bridge for the Sassanian Empire, allowing it to exercise leverage on Yemen and consequently repel the Axumites from taking a stronghold in the south. While the majority of these tribes were pagan, there were also Christian communities and Jewish tribes around Oman.

The Najdi tribes, because of the desert environment that surrounded the Najd plateau, were able to sustain their livelihood on camel breeding and limited agriculture around the al-Qassim and al-Hassa region, where underwater wells irrigated and connected clusters of palm tree oases. These tribes also made it their business to connect trade between the western Hijazi and the eastern Bahraini trade routes whenever weather conditions permitted. Because of the harsh environment of the central region, the tribes living there could be considered semi-nomadic and culturally isolated, and were therefore the least wealthy and sophisticated of the Arab tribes.

The Northern tribes of Arabia mainly consisted of the Lakhmīd and Ghassānid tribes, which migrated from Yemen and settled south of the Fertile Crescent. Both tribes were eventually able to reach the status of a kingdom, the Lakhmīd kingdom establishing itself in Hirah in AD 268, and the Ghassānid in Damascus in AD 502[119] (See map 16). The Lakhmīd tribe, following its initial migration, settled in the Iraq province adjacent to the Sassanian Empire, bordering the Euphrates River, while the Ghassānid tribe became established in the area south of Damascus, Jerusalem and Tabūk, thereby neighbouring the Byzantine Empire[120].

While the two tribes were known for their seasonal agriculture, trade and markets, they each also became an ally to their respective neighbouring powers, a situation which was encouraged by these powers as it granted them a buffer from potential threats from the south[121]. The Ghassānid and Lakhmīd tribes fought for and paid taxes to these empires, and would also occasionally be punished by them when their loyalty came into question.

[119] Hitti, P.K., 2002, pp 78, 81
[120] Nicolle, D., 2004, p 19
[121] Hitti, P.K., 2002, p 80

Although both were Christian, the tribes modelled themselves on the Byzantines and Sassanians and, as their economies were based on facilitating trade between the two, each was able to become extremely wealthy, building palaces, monasteries and churches. They also attained a great degree of sophistication, and became advanced in the arts, culture and science. Although the continuous hostilities between the major empires must have made life very difficult for the Ghassānid and Lakhmīd tribes, it is not clear to what extent they suffered.

1.8.2. The Bedouins

The nomads, or Bedouin tribes of Arabia, played the role of linking the Arabs of the western province with those of the eastern province, crossing the desert in caravans and facilitating trade between the most inaccessible areas. Bedouin society placed its emphasis on the deep cultural values of the group as a unit and, with limited exposure to the outside world, such unspoilt values were passed down throughout the generations. The bonds of the tribes were held together through the male lines, passed down through a largely oral culture of literature and poetry. Rivalries could extend for generations and allegiance to the family unit, combined with the instability of life, often caused fierce competition between clans for the scarce resources[122]. Conflict was therefore never very far away. Underground wells, for example, which were always jealously guarded, were forever a pending source of trouble and disagreement between the tribes. The Bedouins were known, therefore, for raiding and occasionally fighting with other tribes, against whom they competed for water, honour and possessions[123].

Although the Bedouin lived in tents or modest structures of mud and palm thatch, it was they who were considered to be the true keepers of the Arabian culture. Poetry was passed down through the generations and was regarded as the highest form of art, and at markets such as those that took place in Mecca, poems would be recited in public by a professional narrator[124].

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[122] Hitti, P.K., 2002, p 26
[123] Nicolle, D., 2004, pp 12, 16
[124] Hitti, P.K., 2002, p 25

The Bedouin were a relatively simple though skilful people, but they remained resistant to new ideas, especially those not in keeping with their traditions, and they often continued to believe in an idea even when it had been proven wrong, going so far as to enforce outdated ideas if tradition demanded it. Nevertheless, the Bedouin were considered intelligent, courageous, and able to survive the harsh environment and navigate in the desert, and were capable trackers. They were loyal, generous and helpful to their tribe, although they sometimes valued their animals more than their families[125].

1.8.3. Early Mecca

The city of Mecca originated around an ancient temple with square structures, believed to have been built by the prophet Abraham and his son Ishmael to thank God for providing life-supporting water from the well of Zemzem. As a result, it became a holy place of annual pilgrimage for the Arabian tribes and a focal point of cultural and linguistic unity. The Ka'ba itself was draped with the pelts of sacrificial animals, and supposedly held the images and shrines of 360 gods and goddesses. In addition to its religious importance, Mecca became central as a resting point on the western side of Arabia on the trading routes from Africa to Iran and Central Asia, and from North Africa to India between Syria and Yemen[126].

By the 6th century, Mecca was controlled by the strong Qurayysh tribe, whose ruling elite organised itself into syndicates of merchants and wealthy businessmen who enjoyed music and the arts. The population of Mecca was wide-ranging, and the townspeople who lived there in settlements built of stone were invariably richer than the Bedouins. The Qurayysh tribe held lucrative trading agreements with Byzantine and Persian contacts, as well as with the southern Arabian tribes and the Abyssinians (Ethiopians) across the Red Sea. They had the finances to equip and commission caravans, and sponsor and administer them through the appropriate powers of the area they were visiting. In addition, a number of neighbouring

[125] Hitti, P.K., 2002, pp 25, 87
[126] Nicolle, D., 2004, p 26

merchant fairs, such as one usually held at Ukaz, were integrated to extend the cultural dimension of Mecca[127] (See map 17).

Tribal convention also gave Qurayysh the honour of acting as custodians of the Ka'ba[128]. Their duties as such were many and varied, and ranged from the physical maintenance of the site – the repairs, cleaning, and security of the religious idols – to supporting the pilgrims who visited. Qurayysh supervised who would enter the Ka'ba, and were obliged to feed and water the pilgrims who could not afford to sustain themselves on their pilgrimage. Another of their responsibilities was to determine the dates between which tribes were forbidden to fight with one another, and they ensured that all visiting tribes were disarmed. Qurayysh established a council to discuss affairs pertaining to Mecca, which was also responsible for mediating between tribes and parties when any disagreements arose. Members of the council had to be at least 40 years of age, and from one of the wealthy, secure tribes.

It is imperative to point out that Mecca did not only cater for the pagan believers of Arabia, but also attracted Christian and Jewish missionaries, who, because of the Ka'ba's Abrahamic link, would probably have considered it a holy place worthy of homage. They would also have used the pilgrimage as an opportunity to preach their own religious beliefs to the pilgrims. Qurayysh were not threatened by the interest taken by practitioners of other religions, so Mecca was able to exist as an important centre for all religions, and it enjoyed a special status in the known world and among the powers of the time. Mecca played an important religious, cultural and economic role, not only for Arabia and the Arabs, but extending beyond, where it also influenced the people under the dominant empires of the day[129].

1.8.4. Economic and Social Order

For centuries the Byzantines and Sassanians had fought incessantly, with only intermittent peace agreements. The prime objective of the hostilities was not for each empire to

[127] Nicolle, D., 2004, pp 11, 21
[128] Hitti, P.K., 2002, p 100
[129] Hitti, P.K., 2002, pp 100, 104, 107

annihilate the other, as that was not feasible at the time, but each sought to weaken and impoverish the other by impeding their economic capabilities. Each empire tried to move the arena of war as far as possible from its own power base, and it was therefore the area of the Fertile Crescent and Northern Arabia which was most detrimentally affected by the confrontations. If the inhabitants of the area were able to survive the conflicts, chances were that they would be taken into slavery by the opposing empire. The trade and agricultural activity of those who managed to escape death or incarceration, whether they were Persian, Greek, Roman or Arab, were continuously disrupted. Although the Arab tribes who lived in Northern Arabia were Christian, they were hired as mercenaries to engage in skirmishes and insurgence before the regional garrisons were engaged. However, as their loyalty was constantly in question, they were sometimes punished by their respective empires. The war effort also demanded an increase in taxation, despite the economic hardships already being suffered by the communities.

However, contrary to the widely held belief highlighted in some historical texts, that each empire had tremendously weakened the other by the 6th century and made it vulnerable to unexpected Islamic attack from the south by the 7th century, each empire was, in fact, able to remain wealthy and intact, and neither suffered any loss of territory or irreversible damage to their structures. In fact, the constant skirmishes enabled both powers to maintain control over their citizens and provided the ruling elite with security against local adversaries in the name of national security. It is interesting to note that while Constantinople was impregnable because of its geographical location, the close proximity of the Sassanian capital, Ctesiphon, to the war zone in the Fertile Crescent and Northern Arabia, made it more vulnerable to attack. When the centralised capital of Ctesiphon fell in AD 637, the Sassanian Empire was crippled and no longer capable of recovery.

The Byzantines and the Sassanians each regarded themselves as superior to the other and to the rest of the world. The Arab population between the two empires, however, was the least trusted and respected. During times of economic hardship, the Arab tribes were capable of living nomadically, and were therefore not easily taxed. They were unaffected socially by the two empires because they were able to remain outside of their jurisdiction and keep their own language, traditions and culture. Although the two empires had exchanged

control over the Fertile Crescent, neither of them had any political or economic interest in Arabia. They considered the unfertile land to be wasteland, inhabited by fragmented tribes preoccupied with their own internal disputes who subsequently posed no threat to their regional dominance or social order[130].

The Arabs were, in fact, a very sophisticated people, in touch with all the advances in science and technology of the great powers of the day. They also fully understood the role of religion in society, and were good politicians, able to mediate and negotiate deals to enrich their own commerce and that of others. To do this required a thorough knowledge of the characteristics of the cultures of the various people with whom they dealt, in order to bond them together economically. Much of the welfare of these remote provinces depended on the Arab traders for their prosperity and wellbeing, particularly between India, the Horn of Africa, and the Silk Road, as the Arabs were the only people able to navigate these precarious routes through such hostile and unforgiving lands[131] (See map 18).

Religious dissidents suffered persecution during this time, whether it was the Greeks under the Sassanians because they were not Persian or Zoroastrian, or Christians who were not of the same branch of Christianity. Both empires persecuted the Jews and neither had any tolerance of other ideologies or beliefs[132]. Communities with particular religious affiliations were torn between their loyalty to their beliefs and their attachment to their land, which they constantly feared would be taken from them. Various religious clergy, whether Jewish or Christian, were forced into isolation in Arabia or Abyssinia, and in the absence of religious and moral guidance to the general population between the two empires, there arose a state of chaos and lawlessness[133].

As for the Arab social order, equality, particularly between the sexes, was not a concept the Arab people believed in, and they viewed certain people and tribes as better than others due to their wealth and social standing. Women who came from elite tribes or rich families were considered virtuous and enjoyed a great deal of independence and respect. They were

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[130] Nicolle, D., 2004, p 28
[131] Nicolle, D., 2004, p 20
[132] Nicolle, D., 2004, pp 22, 24
[133] Ruthven, M with Nanji, 2004, p 24

allowed to engage in business and commerce, could choose their own lovers and conduct their lives without restrictions imposed by their husbands. Women without such social standing, however, were seen as possessions, and could be bought and sold at will, or sent off to be made pregnant by a man considered to be from a better or wealthier family. Men would marry as many times as their finances would allow, then leave or divorce their wives at will, and could also renounce their wives and children and deny them their inheritance if they so wished; indeed, men were permitted to bury alive any daughter who might bring shame on the family at a later date. Although a divorced woman or widow could be considered part of an inheritance, she was never permitted to remarry, and as begging was considered dishonourable, women without the means to provide for their children would prefer to kill them. Hunting, womanising, drinking and gambling were regarded as symbols of status and elevated a man's standing in the community. In fact, in some non-settled communities, the men were kinder to their animals than they were to their families, as their animals were essential to their livelihood, and these people were, in the main, vengeful, lawless and unpredictable, and lived a chaotic lifestyle[134] [135].

[134] Anglin, J.P. & Hamblin, W.J., 1993, p 193
[135] Nicolle, D., 2004, p 18

Chapter 2: Prophet Muḥammad and the Birth of Islam

6th century Arabia was a land of mixed religions and cultures with the predominant religion of paganism existing alongside Judaism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism, which was practised in the eastern province of Arabia, though not by any Arab tribes. Christianity existed in large communities, and indeed the Northern Arab tribes of the Levant and Mesopotamia were all Christian, as were some tribes of Yemen, Oman and Najran, south of Mecca. Some Jewish tribes settled in Yathrib (Medina) and some in Yemen and Oman[136] (See map 15).

During this time, Mecca was prosperous. As well as being a central trading post, it was renowned throughout the known world as a place of safekeeping for pagan idols, and was also the destination of people wishing to make a pilgrimage to the House of God, and a safe haven for expelled religious communities. The custodians of the Ka'ba, the Qurayysh tribe, offered free food, shelter and protection to people of different religious and ethnic backgrounds who visited Mecca to deal with business and religious matters, thereby adding to the city's cultural diversity and economic prosperity[137]. However, despite their exposure to other beliefs and ideas, the Meccans, who believed that God would protect them for as long as they looked after the Ka'ba and the pagan gods within it, were completely resistant to the idea of adopting other ideologies for themselves, and were therefore totally opposed to the message that Muḥammad was about to deliver[138].

It is no surprise that Muḥammad, a man destined to become a prophet, deliver a new message and start a new religion, began his life in Mecca, a place in which he had constant exposure to the beliefs, ideologies and religions of people from outside of his own cultural milieu. He saw people suffering as a result of war, religious persecution and the decline in social order, and witnessed the resultant injustices. Believing that by changing Mecca he could begin to change the world, he made it his mission to use a universal faith and doctrine

[136] Hourani, A., 1991, p 11
[137] Smart, N., 1999, p 171
[138] Lings, M., 2007, p 21

to bring peace and justice to everybody, regardless of colour, ethnic background or religion[139].

2.1. World Affairs in AD 570

Prophet Muḥammad was born in AD 570 into a chaotic and violent world in which the two great powers of the day, the Byzantine and the Sassanian Empires, had been at war for centuries. Fighting between the two had last erupted in AD 527, and that particular conflict was still raging when Muḥammad was born. The Sassanian Empire had gained the upper hand by AD 572, and although peace treaties had led to the temporary cessation of violence, Byzantine Emperor Justinian II's refusal to pay an annuity to Persia led to the resumption of hostilities in AD 574[140].

Even Arab kingdoms, such as Ghassānid and Lakhmīd, were engaged in skirmishes and in assisting the armies of the warring empires. Southern Arabia had been invaded by the Axumite King Abrahah, who had vowed to destroy the pagan city of Mecca. The assistance of the Sassanian Empire and local Yemeni tribes led by Saif ibn Zeiyazin resulted in Abrahah's expulsion in AD 575, after which time Yemen became a Sassanian vice-royalty. Shortly after, the Yemeni king of the time, King Dhu Nuwās, who was a Jewish convert, wished to protect his country from any future Axumite invasion by eradicating Christianity from Yemen. He persecuted Christians who he believed could assist in future invasions, and many were put in a pit and burned alive[141]. In AD 580, there was a five-year war between the Hawazīn and the Qurayysh over who was to control the trade in Yemeni perfumes, and the Qurayysh were finally victorious and managed to gain a complete monopoly over the southern trade routes[142] (See map 19).

With the exception of Mecca and Yathrib, the economic order of the whole of Arabia came under severe pressure as a direct consequence of the constant fighting[143]. Agriculture and trading activities were often interrupted and economic planning was therefore extremely

[139] Wintle, J., 2003, p 4
[140] Bloom, J. & Blair, S., 2001, p 21
[141] Brown, D., 2004, p 31
[142] Wintle, J., 2003, p 6
[143] Bloom, J. & Blair, S., 2001, p 23

difficult, which meant that many tribes relying on agriculture or trade for their wellbeing became impoverished, and those who lost everything often ended up being sold as slaves. The social order of the day was extremely ruthless, and life was especially hard for those Arabs living between the two empires, whose loyalty was often called into question, although other Arab tribes had their own autonomy and were not taxed by or party to the quarrels between the empires, and therefore ended up living in isolation and obscurity[144].

2.2. Early Life of Muḥammad

Prophet Muḥammad was born into a prominent family in Mecca shortly after the death of his father in Yathrib in AD 570, and as his mother was unable to nurse him, he was entrusted to a Bedouin family in the desert to be brought up (See map 21). It was the usual custom of the settled Arabs to send their children away for a time to be raised in a healthier environment, and also to follow traditional values and learn to speak eloquently in an uncorrupted Arabic[145]. By the time he was six, Muḥammad's mother had also died, and his grandfather, 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, then looked after him. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib recognised Muḥammad's special character but he himself died soon after. Muḥammad's uncle, Abū Ṭālib, an influential leader in Qurayysh, then took care of Muḥammad in Mecca[146]. Although little is known about his early life, it is believed that, like Jesus, Muḥammad gained an appreciation of family values and traditions and was made thoughtful and sensitive to others as a result of his unsettled early childhood. (See diagram 1)

Determined to teach Muḥammad a trade that would ensure his economic self-sufficiency, Abū Ṭālib took Muḥammad on his first trading trip to Bahira in Syria when he was twelve years of age. Although a pagan himself, Abū Ṭālib was ever keen to expose Muḥammad to different people and ideologies, and he often took him to visit monks in a monastery[147] (See map 20). By his early twenties, Muḥammad was displaying a level of wisdom, tact and diplomacy well beyond his years. He quickly became known in Mecca as 'al-amīn', meaning 'the honest, the reliable and the trustworthy', signifying that Muḥammad was seen

[144] Lunde, P., 2002, p 17
[145] Lings, M., 2007, p 23
[146] Armstrong, K., 2006, p 36
[147] Bloom, J. & Blair, S., 2001, p 28

to have reached the highest standard of moral and public life[148]. Even at this early age, Muḥammad was greatly troubled by the declining morality and lack of social order among the tribes, and by the injustice he had witnessed during his childhood and his travels. He may have spent his spare time meditating privately, contemplating the philosophy of life and how life could be improved[149]. He envisaged a socially reformed society which would live in harmony within itself and peacefully alongside others.

In his early twenties, Muḥammad accepted a commission from a wealthy widow and businesswoman 15 years his senior to take a trade caravan north to Syria. He encountered new people who made him aware of the different ideas and schools of thought prevalent at the time. Upon Muḥammad's successful return, the widow, Khadījah, who had at that point been married twice, saw that he possessed a level of maturity, intelligence and trustworthiness unbefitting his youth, and they married when Muḥammad was 25[150]. Khadījah was a tremendous influence on Muḥammad's life. Although she was possibly a mother figure to him, they were intellectually compatible. Despite her age and the fact that she had children from her previous marriages, Khadījah had six children to Muḥammad, four of whom (daughters) survived to adulthood[151]. Three of them later married men who would become Muḥammad's third and fourth caliphs after his death. 'Uthmān married Umm Kulthūm and Ruqayyah in succession, and Fāṭīma married 'Ali.

2.3. The Message

One of Muḥammad's favourite places for contemplation was Mount Hira. It was here that in AD 610, when he was 40 years of age, Muḥammad received his first revelation. Muslims believe that the angel Gabriel acted as God's messenger in delivering this revelation to Muḥammad, which establishes him as a prophet, but not as a divinity. Muḥammad continued to receive messages from God for the rest of his life. His wife and daughters were the first to embrace Islam, quickly followed by his cousin and future successor 'Ali, and his friend Abū Bakr and his servant. The essence of these revelations was similar to

[148] Armstrong, K., 2006, p 37
[149] Esposito, J.L., 1999, p 6
[150] Hitti, P.K., 2002, p 112
[151] Lings, M., 2007, p 37

that of those received by earlier Hebrew prophets - that there was one all-powerful God who was creator of the universe, and that there would come a Judgment Day upon which God's followers would gain entry to paradise, and those who had not listened to his word would be condemned to hell[152]. The revelations were revealed to Muḥammad either before or after significant events or in response to queries. They came in whole verses or parts of verses, or occasionally in whole chapters. Fearing that the wording would be forgotten or corrupted, scribes recorded the revelations on whatever material was available, be it leather, palm leaves or bark, as soon as they were recited by the Prophet153. His sayings, actions and approvals were also recorded separately in Ḥadīth, sometimes explaining the verses of the Koran or the directives on morality, conduct, and practices of the new religion[154].

In AD 620, Muḥammad told of his experience of a 'Night Journey' during which he ascended to heaven from Jerusalem and was instructed to adhere to the Five Pillars of Islam, the simple tenets for the worship of the faith which Muslims are obliged to observe. This is what led to Jerusalem becoming the holy city faced by people practising the five daily prayers[155] [156]. Subsequently, Mecca replaced Jerusalem as the direction to be faced during prayer. The journey also enforced the respect of Islam and acknowledged the concept of monotheism taught by Abraham and shared with Judaism and Christianity, making it evident that Islam embraced those religions and perceived itself as the final step in the evolution of monotheistic faith and Muḥammad as the last in the line of prophets. The concept and ideology of monotheism, having begun with Abraham's faith in the one unseen God and moved on to the Ten Commandments of Moses, then the love and peace of Jesus, reached its apex with the universal message of Muḥammad and his doctrines and teachings. Muslims believe that when God wants to send future messages to mankind, it will happen in a manner of his choice[157].

It could not have been easy for Muḥammad to win over the Arabs with his message of a new moral social order. He was most strongly opposed by the Qurayysh tribe of Mecca,

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[152] Stewart, P.J., 1999, pp 35, 36
[153] Clark, M., 2003, pp 105, 106
[154] Clark, M., 2003, p 119
[155] Armstrong, K., 2006, p 97
[156] Wintle, J., 2003, p 20
[157] Clark, M., 2003, p 87

especially his own uncles. The ruling merchants were very concerned with the impact that Muḥammad's message might have on Mecca, and were particularly anxious that their livelihood, much of which came from pilgrims visiting their idols kept for safety in the Ka'ba, would be affected. In an attempt to contain Muḥammad they offered him a lucrative position in the city, but when their bribery failed they resorted to the persecution and torture of his believers and eventually boycotted him, his family and his friends[158].

During this time, a group of prominent representatives of the different tribes of Yathrib visited Mecca. These people were aware that the constant feuding between the various tribes of Yathrib was detrimental not only to community relations but also to the city's business and trade arrangements. As a result of their mistrust for one another, the feuding tribes would only be able to resolve their differences through the intervention of a trustworthy outsider. Upon meeting Muḥammad, the tribes' representatives, knowing his reputation as an honest mediator, recognised that he might have the diplomatic skills required to mediate the peace in Yathrib and thereby restore its economic equilibrium, and they invited him to visit Yathrib for that purpose. Muḥammad agreed that he would do so, but at that stage he did not say when[159].

2.4. The Hijrah

The Qurayysh stepped up its campaign of intimidation from confiscation of assets to persecution, torture and eventually murder[160]. In spite of this, the number of people embracing Muḥammad's message continued to grow, especially among slaves, the poor and the socially oppressed, who had nothing to lose and everything to gain from Muḥammad's message. Muḥammad's increasing popularity worried the Qurayysh even further, as they feared the onset of a social revolution, and they began to resort to personal intimidation and character assassination, trying to discredit Muḥammad by calling him a magician, a poet and a liar.

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[158] Lings, M., 2007, p 53
[159] Clark, M., 2003, p 88
[160] Brown, D., 2004, p 74

In AD 615, Muḥammad sent 83 of his followers to Abyssinia to ask the Christian king Negus for refuge and protection (See map 22). On questioning these people about the Islamic faith, the king learned of Islam's acceptance of Christian tenets such as the one god and the virgin birth, and their belief in Jesus as a messenger from God. He recognised the inherent similarities between Islam and Christianity and appreciated that Islam did not present any blasphemy or contradiction, and so he gave the people peace and refuge, denying the request of the Qurayysh that they be returned to Mecca[161]. When Prophet Muḥammad had received assurances that Yathrib was also ready to accept his followers, and he had no fear that they would be sent back to Mecca, he started to ask 70 of his followers to migrate to Yathrib[162]. In AD 622, following the deaths of his wife, Khadījah, and his protector and uncle Abū Ṭālib, and a subsequent attempt on his life, Muḥammad felt that the time was right for him to leave Mecca for Yathrib.

With the assistance of a guide, Muḥammad and Abū Bakr made the treacherous 350-kilometre journey north via indirect routes, travelling south of Mecca first, so as not to draw attention to themselves (See map 21). Upon their safe arrival at their destination, they were warmly welcomed by the different tribes of Yathrib, al-Anṣār, (the supporters), as well as by the new Muslim community (the Muhājirūn), which was increasing in number and in confidence, and they were treated with great respect. Yathrib was then renamed as the City of the Prophet, Medina[163]. (See map 22)

Muḥammad's journey to Yathrib (Medina) is known as the Hijrah, or migration. It is generally recognised as the true beginning of Islam, and is therefore the date that Muslims use to mark the first year of their calendar. The journey was a turning point for Muḥammad, who rapidly gained support and quickly rose to prominence. In due course he amalgamated his role of social arbitrator with that of administrator of the people, thus combining the city's religious and administrative affairs, which was eventually to become an established practice for future Islamic states and empires[164].

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[161] Lings, M., 2007, p 83
[162] Lunde, P., 2002, p 20
[163] Smart, N., 1999, p 172
[164] Brown, D., 2004, p 77

2.5. Muḥammad in Medina

When Muḥammad settled in Medina, he built a mosque as a place in which to pray, and also to gather, teach and advise the people. The first communal prayer meeting was held on a Friday afternoon, after which time Friday became the official Muslim day of worship[165]. The inhabitants of Medina consisted of the Arab majority, made up of the Aws and Khazraj tribes, and the Jewish tribes of Bani Nadir, Banī Qurayẓah and Banī Qaynūq'a, who had come to Medina to escape Roman persecution and lived in protective forts on the outskirts of the city. The Arabs and Jews had, in the past, peacefully coexisted for the most part, as the Arabs' skills in trade and agriculture were complemented by the Jews' abilities in finance, smithying and crafts. However, the various tribes had recently become unruly and hostile towards one another, and knowing of Muḥammad's conciliatory skills, Medina's leaders sought his assistance with the mediation process. The Arabs immediately embraced Muḥammad and the Jewish tribes, who had heard of his tolerance and fairness, began to feel that his presence was helpful and unifying and were therefore happy to lend him their support[166]. It is likely, also, that both groups were shrewd enough to recognise that a combination of peace among the people of Yathrib and an influx of immigrants from Mecca, in addition to the presence of a prophet and the new faith he brought with him, would bring a new wealth and prosperity to Yathrib, turning it from a simple oasis to an attractive trading post, perhaps granting Medina the affluence and prestige that was already been enjoyed by Mecca[167].

The Prophet fulfilled his obligation to those who had initially invited him to Medina by concluding the Constitution of Medina, a comprehensive legal document which was designed to promote harmony between the Arabs, Jews and other peoples of the city by clarifying issues of law and order and personal conduct, such as inter-tribal marriage and trade. Under this accord, each party agreed not to conspire against the other or side with any other outside force against the other, and a clause was included which stated that anyone who violated the treaty would be dealt with in accordance with the traditional

[165] Wintle, J., 2003, p 22
[166] Zahoor, A., 2000, p 30
[167] Wintle, J., 2003, p 26

procedures of the time. The treaty was ratified by all of the inhabitants of Medina[168]. It was during this time that Muḥammad decided to change the direction of prayer, the qiblah, to face Mecca instead of Jerusalem. While it was important to him that the Jewish tribes did not feel threatened, Muḥammad wished to make it clear that his faith objective was Mecca and not Jerusalem[169].

It was not long before visitors started to arrive in Medina from countries outside of Arabia, including India, Persia, Byzantium, Yemen, Egypt and Abyssinia[170]. This strengthened Medina's Muslim community and ensured that Muḥammad's message was being spread throughout the known world, which undermined the Qurayysh's position of prestige and power and therefore increased their anxiety, and the persecution of Muḥammad's followers and family continued[171].

2.6. Confrontation with the Qurayysh and its Allies

In AD 624, the Muslims of Medina heard that a rich caravan, led by prominent Meccan Abū Sufyān, was travelling towards Mecca along the northern trade route from Syria. The Prophet recognised that the most effective way of applying pressure on the Qurayysh was by threatening its livelihood, and he therefore planned to seize the caravan to give him greater leverage in negotiations for the release of Muslim prisoners and assets being held by the Qurayysh in Mecca. Muḥammad perhaps hoped that he could do enough economic damage to obtain a treaty from the Qurayysh without having to engage in unnecessary fighting[172].

When the Qurayysh became aware of Muḥammad's intentions, it sent a force of approximately 1,000 warriors to protect the caravan from any attempt by the Muslims to seize it[173]. This force was formed of Meccans from the Qurayysh and from other tribes. However, in an effort to avoid the Muslim threat, Abū Sufyān had taken the coastal route

[168] Lunde, P., 2002, p 20
[169] Armstrong, K., 2006, p 107
[170] Zahoor, A., 2000, p 30
[171] Ahmed, H., 2006, p 68
[172] Lings, M., 2007, p 135
[173] Wintle, J., 2003, p 28

and the caravan went on to arrive safely in Mecca (See map 20). Upon hearing this news, some of the warriors returned to Mecca, as they believed that they had fulfilled their obligations and were perhaps reluctant to become involved in a conflict with members of their own tribe or family. Other warriors, however, felt that they had the strength and initiative to diffuse any potential threat from the Muslims by sending a decisive blow upon their forces, thereby deterring Muḥammad from any future attempt to jeopardise the trade route[174]. These Meccans decided to confront the Muslim forces at the well in Badr, 75 kilometres southwest of Medina, although the Muslims had the advantage of having arrived there first and were therefore in control of the water[175]. (See map 22)

The Prophet had imposed various restrictions on his 314 fighting volunteers which were a complete break from traditional tribal warfare. The volunteers had been instructed that no one should be mutilated or enslaved or killed by burning, and that no woman or child should be harmed. Prisoners were to be treated humanely and provided with food, drink, clothing and medical attention, and were only to be held until they were exchanged or ransomed, and those prisoners who accepted Islam were to be granted a full pardon. No trees were to be cut down, no houses destroyed or agricultural land ravaged[176].

The initial duels fought between Qurayysh and Muslim individuals failed to resolve the conflict, and fighting escalated into a larger confrontation between the two sides, although the scale of the engagement is unknown. Despite the restrictions placed on the Muslim volunteers and the vast difference in the numbers of the respective forces, the Muslims, who called upon their faith to provide them with moral support in battle, displayed considerable heroism and determination[177]. For the first time, the Qurayysh was being confronted by members of its own tribe who were prepared to fight against them for the sake of honouring their new belief. Many of the Qurayysh fighters fled and, of those who were captured, some were sent to Medina to teach children to read, some were allowed to ransom themselves out and others were released. The estimated casualty figures from this

[174] Armstrong, K., 2006, p 132
[175] Stewart, P.J., 1999, p 78
[176] Stewart, P.J., 1999, p 76
[177] Lings, M., 2007, p 147

encounter differ from source to source. However, it is thought that approximately 14 Muslims died and around 70 pagans were killed or injured, and around 70 were captured[178].

The comparatively low casualty figures might indicate that the incident at Badr was more of a skirmish than a full-blown battle between two strong and determined fighting forces[179]. The Meccans may not have been aware of the Muslims' location at the well and were probably there to avail of the water in preparation for the fighting which they believed would follow at another location. They could, therefore, have been surprised by the readiness of the Muslims to fight. The fact that a number of the Meccan fighters left before the battle began would suggest that they believed the caravan to be safe. The remaining warriors did not to regroup after their initial defeat, this may have been because of an unwillingness to fight members of their own tribe or an acceptance that they were not able to prevail in their current state. Alternatively, believing the caravan to be safe and their objective met, some of the Meccans may have seen no reason to continue fighting as they felt no deep affiliation with the Qurayysh and were not prepared to fight and die for them. The Muslims could be said to have been victorious at Badr not only because they had managed to thwart the Meccan attack with minimum casualties, but also because they had achieved their goal of interrupting the Qurayysh's trading activities[180]. Travelling with weapons and armies was not a viable solution to the new threat from the Muslims because armed trade caravans would be too cumbersome and unwieldy, so the Qurayysh were forced to find an alternative to the northern trade route to Syria which it had been accustomed to following. The alternative route was eastbound to Najd and northbound to Iraq, which was a considerably longer and more hazardous journey, so their profit margins would have been markedly reduced, putting greater economic pressure on the Qurayysh and thereby undermining its power[181].

When the news of the Qurayysh defeat reached Mecca, it became clear that the Muslims' determination and their local support from Medina had been underestimated. Keen to restore Qurayysh honour and dignity and to break the economic blockade potentially

[178] Zahoor, A., 2000, p 31
[179] Armstrong, K., 2006, p 135
[180] Armstrong, K., 2006, pp 142, 165
[181] Lings, M., 2007, p 153

threatening their trade, they decided to utilise the profits made by the saved caravan to equip a larger force[182].

A year after the confrontation at Badr, a second offensive was led by Abū Sufyān, who was determined to consolidate his leadership and avenge the lives that had been lost when he altered the course of his caravan and thereby escaped the battle at Badr. He was able to gather about 3,000 warriors from the Qurayysh and other Arab tribes, among them the many volunteers who wished to exact tribal revenge upon the Muslims[183]. Recognising that the Muslims were empowered by the fact that they were fighting for their faith, Abū Sufyān took the wives, children and slaves of his forces to the scene of the battle to ensure that his warriors also had something for which they would be prepared to fight and die. Indeed, many of the women on the journey went on to become part of the fighting force.

In AD, the Meccan forces met approximately 1,000 Muslim warriors, among them women, in an area next to Mount Uhud, not far north of Medina (See map 22). On the battlefield was a strategic hill upon which the Muslims had placed archers to protect their flanks against surprise attacks. With Khālid ibn al-Walīd's cavalry positioned at the foot of hill but initially standing off, the infantry of the two sides met and fought and, eventually feeling that the Muslims had gained the upper hand, the Meccan fighters fled. Believing that the battle was won, the Muslim archers left their positions and came down from the hill to celebrate their victory. Khālid ibn al-Walīd seized this opportunity and charged his cavalry at the Muslims and, as the Meccans had thereby gained the advantage, the Muslims fled for the safety of Medina[184]. It is notable that only 70 Muslims and 22 Meccans are reported to have died in this confrontation, which might suggest that the incident at Mount Uhud was less an attempt to overcome and annihilate the opposition than a limited-engagement confrontation intended to demonstrate strength, solidarity, power and wealth[185].

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[182] Lings, M., 2007, p 172
[183] Zahoor, A., 2000, p 31
[184] Brown, D., 2004, p 80
[185] Lings, M., 2007, p 181

Although it could be said that their retreat signalled a Muslim defeat, there was no clear winner or loser at Uhud. The Meccans did not pursue the fleeing Muslims, perhaps because they recognised that their fight was no longer just with Muḥammad and his initial supporters, but also with members of other tribes from Medina who had begun to fight on his side, and the Muslims were incapable of launching a counterattack[186]. However, Abū Sufyān's forces were content that the conflict had resolved itself when they were able to disperse the Muslims and force them back to Medina. They were not willing to regroup and go into further battle as they felt that they had already exacted their revenge for Badr and gained a moral victory, although they had failed to neutralise the potential threat to their trade as the northern trade route was still in jeopardy[187]. The Qurayysh's apparent success encouraged other pagan tribes, who now felt that they could undermine the Muslims, to launch their own skirmishes and offences against Medina.

The third confrontation between the Qurayysh and the Muslims was the Battle of the Trench, which took place in AD 627 (See map 22). Abū Sufyān gathered approximately 10,000 to 12,000 warriors from a coalition of pagan tribes, including Banī Ghaṭafān, Banī Ashja, Banī Fazārah and Banī Sulayym, with the intention of annihilating the Muslims from Medina[188]. By involving other tribes in the dispute, the Qurayysh had managed to widen the confrontation with Muḥammad. They believed that if they were victorious and tribes of Medina, other than Muḥammad and his followers, suffered casualties, any acts of reprisal would not just be against the Qurayysh but also against other Arab tribes.

The Prophet was advised by his companion, a Persian Muslim called Salmān al-Fārsī, that the best defence against the Meccan coalition would be to dig a trench in the place from which it would be most likely to launch an attack on Medina. Taking advantage of the terrain to dig a trench would allow the Muslims to frustrate any attempt by the coalition to invade the city. The trench was subsequently dug north of Medina, and after the Meccans reached it and besieged Medina, which was being defended by 3,000 Muslims, the two sides exchanged arrow fire for days. A cold wind then began to blow from the north,

[186] Armstrong, K., 2006, p 143
[187] Lings, M., 2007, pp 183, 190
[188] Zahoor, A., 2000, p 32

making the siege almost impossible, and the coalition decided to return to Mecca. This confrontation resulted in the deaths of six Muslims and eight Meccans[189].

While the Battle of the Trench was underway, some members of the Meccan coalition had begun to recognise the dramatic influence that the Prophet had on his followers and see that his supporters, through his message, had found a purpose in life and a cause for which they were prepared die[190]. These people began to question whether their own pagan ideology was worth dying for, and started to resent the family and tribal disloyalty that the battles with Muḥammad's followers represented. This prompted a defection from Qurayysh and its neighbouring tribes to Muḥammad's side, thereby increasing the number of Muslims.

It is interesting to note that in discussing the various clashes between the Muslims and the Meccans, it is often assumed that Muḥammad's primary incentive for becoming engaged in conflict was the booty and spoils of war that he could take away from each encounter. It must be pointed out that this suggestion is extremely misleading[191]. As is evidenced by the extremely low casualty counts, none of the confrontations in which Muḥammad and his volunteer forces were involved could be considered out-and-out wars, but were rather defensive and often ideological strategic skirmishes[192]. Had Muḥammad sought materialistic gain from any encounter with the Qurayysh, he would surely have ravaged or besieged cities and villages and taken possession of the wealth of their inhabitants. Muḥammad's purpose, however, was ideological, his intention being to spread his message and share his revelations. The Muslim fighting forces consisted of volunteers who believed in and supported Muḥammad's message, and both Muḥammad's supporters and his opposition largely consisted of members of his own family. It is unlikely that he would have threatened the lives of his supporters or his opponents for the purpose of extracting the few arms and personal possessions of the individuals who lost their lives in the various confrontations, and there is no historical evidence to suggest that Muḥammad ever stopped

[189] Stewart, P.J., 1999, p 83
[190] Armstrong, K., 2006, p 161
[191] Nafziger, G.F., & Walton, M.W., 2003, p 14
[192] Stewart, P.J., 1999, p 82

or looted any caravans going into or coming out of Mecca, either for the purpose of exacting revenge or to gain the spoils of war[193].

2.7. Confrontations with Jewish Tribes of Medina

During the encounters at both Badr and Uhud, some Jews embraced Islam and fought on the side of the Prophet. Indeed, the chief rabbi of Banī Qaynūq'a, Ḥusayn ibn Sallām, died at Badr fighting with the Muslims, and in Uhud, the bodies of some members of the Jewish clan of Tha'alabah, including their rabbi, Mukhāriq, were found amongst those who had died fighting for Muḥammad[194]. However, Abū Sufyān, who hoped to be able to defeat Muḥammad without having to fight a war, was trying to create division within the tribes of Medina in order to reduce support for Muḥammad and leave him displaced and demoralised. He hoped that if the Jewish tribes withdrew their support, the Arab tribes would follow suit, and Muḥammad would be defeated and lose the base from which he was confronting and threatening the economic welfare of Qurayysh[195].

Abū Sufyān's attempts to create divisions between the tribes of Medina would have been assisted by the fact that some Jewish tribes were becoming alarmed by Muḥammad's increasing strength and influence after Badr[196]. Before Muḥammad moved to Medina, some elite inhabitants of the city had been used to living comfortably under a system that allowed them to work towards increasing their own personal wealth. Muḥammad's message of racial and social equality and economic reform must therefore have sent shockwaves through those communities that had profited from the old system, whether they were Jews or non-Jews, and when it became clear that Muḥammad's teachings would lessen rather than increase their privileges, the people felt compelled to find a way of preventing him from further curtailing their economic advancement. They were also unwilling to accept his ideology which demanded a willingness to risk life and wealth in its defence. They were

[193] Armstrong, K., 2006, p 163
[194] Zahoor, A., 2000, pp 31, 32
[195] Wintle, J., 2003, p 29
[196] Stewart, P.J., 1999, p 79

not willing to pay such a high price for a belief to which they did not subscribe and were of the opinion that Muḥammad had so far brought them only conflict.

During the early months of AD 624, the Jewish tribe of Banī Qaynūq'a began to feel that the growing strength in Muslim numbers and support after Badr was resulting in the loss of their own prestige and economic control of Medina. The Banī Qaynūq'a believed that their agreement to the Medina accord had been premature, as they had not understood when they signed the accord that their status in Medina would be undermined by Muḥammad and his teachings, which were in direct conflict with Jewish practices, especially in the areas of finance, usury and ethics. The Jewish people felt that the exclusivity privileges granted to them by the Torah meant that their laws extended only to interactions with other Jewish people, and also that they had the right to break old alliances and create new ones. Despite being signatories to the Constitution of Medina, the Banī Qaynūq'a therefore started a rebellion in Medina in the hope that it would grow into full-scale sectarian conflict. However, the rebellion was unsuccessful and the Banī Qaynūq'a tribe was besieged and expelled from Medina with all their assets and possessions. Some moved to Khaybar, an oasis 80 kilometres north of Medina on the trade route to Syria, and others to Wadi al-Qura on the border of Syria[197] (See map 22). It must be pointed out that this expulsion was in no way an act of ethnic cleansing. Far from being punished with exile to a barren place in which the standard of living would be harsh and unrewarding, the Jewish tribes that were separated from the community of Medina were in fact allowed to settle in a fertile region in which they could easily sustain themselves. As there is no historical evidence that there were Jews in Khayber before this first expulsion from Medina, and it is unclear who owned Khayber, the expulsion could in fact be seen as an exchange of assets between the Jews and the Muslims.

At some time during AD 626, Abū Sufyān secretly met with the leader of the Bani Nadir tribe, Ḥuyayy ibn Akhṭab, and convinced him that the Jewish tribes in Medina should protect their own interests by outwardly showing support for Muḥammad while actually

[197] Zahoor, A., 2000, p 31

conspiring against him by siding with the Qurayysh. After the confrontation at Uhud, the Prophet became aware that there had been some secret communication between Bani Nadir and the Qurayysh, which was in direct contravention of the Constitution of Medina. When Muḥammad went to discuss this with Ḥuyayy ibn Akhṭab, the Bani Nadir attempted to assassinate him by throwing a rock at him from the walls of their fort. An opportunistic sympathiser by the name of 'Abdullāh ibn 'Ubayy, pleaded with the Prophet to grant Bani Nadir clemency, and he requested that their punishment for the attempted assassination be expulsion from Medina. Bani Nadir was subsequently expelled, although they were allowed to take their possessions with them, and like Banī Qaynūq'a before them, they moved to Khaybar and Wadi al-Qura[198]. (See map 22)

Ḥuyayy ibn Akhṭab was bitter about having been expelled from Medina and launched a campaign aimed at turning the rest of the Jewish tribes against Muḥammad. He went to Medina and secretly met with the chief of Banī Qurayẓah, Ka'b ibn Asad, and assured him that the Banī Qurayẓah would greatly benefit from the future victory of the Qurayysh over the Muslims, and that the expelled tribes would perhaps be allowed to return to Medina. Ka'b ibn Asad was thereby persuaded to break his pledge to Muḥammad and secretly side with the Qurayysh. Having secured Banī Qurayẓah 's support, Ḥuyayy ibn Akhṭab went to Mecca and assured Abū Sufyān that there would be local support for his second invasion of Medina, and offered to be instrumental in rallying support from other Arab tribes to increase the coalition against Muḥammad[199].

After the Battle of the Trench in AD 627, Muḥammad became aware of the fact that the Jewish tribes had been conspiring with the Qurayysh, and he faced them with a charge of treachery. The Banī Qurayẓah were besieged by the Muslims for 25 days, after which time it surrendered unconditionally. Muḥammad placed the Banī Qurayẓah 's fate in the hands of the head of the Khazraj tribe, Sa'ad ibn Mu'adh, who decided that the tribe should be punished according to Deuteronomy, XX:13-14 in the Torah[200]. The warriors who had been prepared to participate in the attack against the Muslims, including Ḥuyayy ibn Akhṭab and

[198] Brown, D., 2004, pp 80, 81
[199] Stewart, P.J., 1999, p 81
[200] Ahmed, H., 2006, p 72

Ka'b ibn Asad were rounded up and executed, although the number of those executed is unknown. The remainder of the tribe was expelled from Medina and denied the opportunity to take their possessions with them[201]. Although the three main Jewish tribes had at this stage been dispersed, there were groups of Jewish people who remained in Medina. Some converted to Islam while others remained Jewish and Muḥammad, in an act of reconciliation, married a Jewish woman called Ṣafiyya. (See diagrams 2, 3)

A year later, in AD 628, after the Prophet had signed the Treaty of Hudaybiyyah with the leaders of the Qurayysh, the news travelled to Medina from Khayber that the Jewish tribes were forming another coalition with the northern Arab pagan tribes, and it was estimated that about 20,000 people were rallying from the north. The Prophet marched to Khayber with 1,500 volunteers and, as he was not expected, he managed to besiege one fort after another, exacting a surrender from each before moving onto the next, until he was finally able to negotiate a treaty[202] (See map 22). The attempted coalition was dissolved and Muḥammad offered his protection in return for half of the tribes' agricultural produce. By the time the treaty was drawn up, the casualties of the campaign stood at approximately 14 Muslims and 93 Jews. Another attempt was then made on Muḥammad's life, this time by the widowed wife of Sallām ibn Mishkām, who gave the Prophet a meal of poisoned lamb. One of Muḥammad's companions, Bishr, was killed but the Prophet survived the incident, the effect of the poison being the occasional headaches that he suffered for the rest of his life. The woman was pardoned[203].

Muḥammad had no further clashes with the Jewish tribes after the incident at Khayber, and although there is no decisive historical evidence to suggest what became of the tribes after this period, it is thought that they kept their land and possessions and capitulated. It is evident, then, that it was never Muḥammad's intention to fight with the Jews for the purpose of extracting their possessions from them as booty or spoils of war. The only times that the Muslims can be said to have made modest material gains as a result of having engaged in conflict were when Banī Qurayẓah were penalised for treachery by being forced

[201] Brown, D., 2004, p 81
[202] Ahmed, H., 2006, p 73
[203] Zahoor, A., 2000, p 32

to leave Medina without their possessions, and when, after Khayber, the Bani Nadir lost half of their crops in capitulation to the Muslims.

2.8. The Treaty of Hudaybiyyah

In AD 628, Prophet Muḥammad decided that he wanted to settle his differences with the Qurayysh peacefully instead of militarily. In March of that year, he intended to perform the minor pilgrimage (*'umra*) to Mecca, unarmed, with 1,400 other Muslims, although he understood that this was the opportunity that his adversaries had been waiting for and that his life and those of his fellow pilgrims would be in grave danger. When the news of Muḥammad's pilgrimage reached the Qurayysh, they put together a large force led by Khālid ibn al-Walīd to intercept Muḥammad's march to Mecca. This force met the Muslims at their camp at Hudaybiyyah, a sanctuary area outside Mecca.

After lengthy negotiations, a ten-year peace treaty was drawn up between Muḥammad and the Qurayysh. Under the terms of the Treaty of Hudaybiyyah, Muḥammad was required to discontinue his pilgrimage for that year but was promised that he could return to Mecca for three nights every year to follow. Both sides agreed not to fight the other for the next ten years and promised not to seek or aid any alliance against the other. The Qurayysh agreed that anybody who wanted to join Muḥammad in Medina would be allowed to do so and, for his part, Muḥammad stated that he would inform the Qurayysh of any such defection. Whoever wanted to be Muslim would be allowed to be and pagans would not be forced to accept a different religion against their will.

Although many of the Prophet's companions felt that this treaty was tantamount to a defeat for the Muslims, Muḥammad believed that the truce was important as it granted him the time he required to resolve other situations, such as that which later developed at Khayber. In order to diffuse any potentially disruptive disagreement between himself and his companions, Muḥammad requested that those who continued to support him renew their oath to him. The fact that everyone did renew their oath was seen as a vote of confidence in

Muḥammad and his leadership and the Muslims were able to move forward without any threat of internal dissatisfaction[204].

Prophet Muḥammad took the opportunity afforded him by the peace that resulted from the treaty to send letters to kings, heads of state and governors of the known world, informing them of Islam and asking them to allow their people to embrace Islam without fear of persecution. He also requested that the leaders themselves accept Islam for the sake of their own salvation, suggesting that failure to do so would be a sin according to their own religions. Muḥammad sent a total of 30 letters to various world leaders, including Heraclius, Emperor of Byzantium, Khosroes II, the Sassanian Emperor, Negus, King of Abyssinia, al-Muqawqis, ruler of Egypt, Ḥarīth Ghassānī, Arab governor of Syria, and al-Mundhir ibn Sawa'h, ruler of Bahrain. In addition to these letters, Muḥammad also concluded a treaty of alliance with the monks at the St Catherine Monastery in Mount Sinai, granting them full autonomy for as long as they did not take arms against him or aid others against him[205]. These letters and treaties were important in the sense that they proved that Islam was not spread by force and violence as many Western references suggest, but there was, in fact, a peaceful call to embrace Islam and allow people to choose their own religion without fear of persecution[206].

Some of the kings and leaders who received Muḥammad's letters did indeed embrace the call, some felt insulted by the letters and rejected the call immediately, and some simply contemplated the implications of Muḥammad's message. Ḥarīth Ghassānī's response to Muḥammad's letter was to kill 14 out of the 15 people that made up the Muslim emissary. This was perceived as an act of war so, in AD 629, Prophet Muḥammad sent a force of 3,000 volunteers north to Syria to either punish Ghassānī or force him to sign a treaty. On hearing of the imminent attack, Ḥarīth Ghassānī had called for the Byzantine garrison in Palestine to come to his aid. This garrison camped in a place south of the Dead Sea called Mu'tah, where it was met by the Muslims, led by Zayd ibn Ḥarithah and Khālid ibn al-Walīd, who had by now joined the Muslims (See map 22). After brief skirmishes at Mu'tah, the Muslim army retreated to Medina, having lost 13 people. The significance of

[204] Brown, D., 2004, p 83
[205] Zahoor, A., 2000, p 33
[206] Wintle, J., 2003, p 29

this encounter was that it drew the attention of the Roman garrison and the Arab governor of Syria to the Muslim phenomenon in Arabia. From the Muslim perspective, the Byzantine garrison presented a potential threat to the Muslims' existence and to their ability to trade and spread Muḥammad's message[207].

2.9. The Return to Mecca

During AD 629, the same year as the battle at Mu'tah, the Qurayysh violated the Treaty of Hudaybiyyah when one of its allies, the tribe of Banī Bakr, attacked the tribe of Khuzā'ah, which was part of Muḥammad's coalition. In response, Prophet Muḥammad led 10,000 warriors south to Mecca. When word reached Abū Sufyān that a 10,000-strong Muslim force would soon be descending upon Mecca, he took decisive action by meeting Muḥammad before he entered the city. He apologised for the fact that the Qurayysh had broken the truce and pleaded with Muḥammad, asking him to spare Mecca and all its inhabitants. Abū Sufyān felt that his internal support was dwindling and that Mecca had lost its prestige and power and was no longer able to defend itself. He also recognised that Islam was a force he could not counter or eliminate, so he reluctantly accepted the religion.

In AD 630, Muḥammad and his 10,000 volunteers marched peacefully into Mecca from the north, proclaiming that anybody who stayed at home or sought refuge in the home of Abū Sufyān or in the sanctuary area of the Ka'ba would be safe[208] (See map 21). Muḥammad bore no grudge against those who had challenged or fought against him, but unleashed his anger on the pagan idols stored in the Ka'ba, which he personally destroyed, and he then washed the Ka'ba as a symbol of cleansing. This act of destruction put an end to the religion of Muḥammad's ancestors and began a new chapter in Arab history. Before Muḥammad returned to Mecca, the Muslim perception of Arab life was that they lived in "jāhilīyah", ignorance of God's way, and Muḥammad was able to close the chapter on this backward lifestyle and mentality. While the rules of traditional tribal warfare would have dictated that Muḥammad would maim, enslave or kill the Meccan men, confiscate their property and sell their women and children on the market, Muḥammad's victory was

[207] Stewart, P.J., 1999, p 86
[208] Ahmed, H., 2006, p 75

marked by reunion and reconciliation, and nobody was harmed or forced to convert to Islam[209].

2.10 The Confrontation in Hunayn

However, Muḥammad's return to Mecca did not mark an end to all hostilities. 15 days after his return, the southern pagan tribes of Hawazīn and Thaqīf, led by Mālik ibn Owf, gathered a force of 20,000 people at al-Ta'if. The Hawazīn and the Thaqīf were enraged by the fact that Muḥammad had destroyed their pagan gods in the Ka'ba, and felt that this was an act of war for which Muḥammad must be punished by death. They also believed that, as Muḥammad had secured Mecca, it would only be a matter of time before he marched south to al-Ta'if, which was a pagan stronghold, so they wanted to make a pre-emptive attack on Muḥammad in Mecca. Mālik ibn Owf's aim was to march on Mecca to avenge their gods, and he ensured that his men would fight with everything they had by commanding them to take their women, children and possessions with them to the battlefield[210].

Muḥammad, who had been made aware of the threat of imminent attack from the Hawazīn and Thaqīf, had begun to march south with 10,000 supporters to meet the southern tribes. However, Muḥammad had no idea of the magnitude of the southern tribes' fighting forces or of the extent of their anger and the ferocity with which they were prepared to fight. The pagan tribes had gained the higher ground in Hunayn, south of Mecca, where they ambushed the Muslims as they marched through the valley[211]. Muḥammad had thought that dispersing the pagan tribes would be easy, but it was only after sustained, fierce fighting that the Muslim forces were able to subdue the pagan army and lay siege to their fortresses. Although the casualty figures are unknown, the battle at Hunayn was thought to have been the bloodiest of all the encounters in which Muḥammad was involved and the Prophet himself is reported to have sustained injuries. The battle was not resolved by any real victory or defeat, however, as the southern tribes were simply besieged until such time as they were able to negotiate a settlement. Muḥammad eventually promised that he would neither carry out his threat to burn their crops nor continue the siege if the southern tribes

[209] Wintle, J., 2003, p 34
[210] Ahmed, H., 2006, p 75
[211] Wintle, J., 2003, p 34

promised not to attack him again. The southern tribes suggested that they would convert to Islam if they were allowed to keep their pagan idols, an offer that Muḥammad refused[212]. Ironically, after Muḥammad had withdrawn his forces from al-Tha'if, Mālik ibn Owf, who led the campaign against Muḥammad, unconditionally embraced Islam and went on to be instrumental in the handing over of al-Tha'if and its inhabitants to Muḥammad[213].

2.11. Muḥammad Returns to Medina

In the same year, AD 630, when the Muslims had subdued the southern tribes in al-Tha'if and successfully secured Mecca and cleansed it of pagan idols, Prophet Muḥammad wished to acknowledge his gratitude to his supporters in Medina, without whose assistance Islam would have faded into obscurity. Muḥammad therefore returned to Medina out of gratitude to the al-Anṣār, who had believed in and looked after him and fought on the side of the Meccan Muslims. While he was in Medina, he received news that a large Byzantine force, alerted by the skirmishes in Mu'tah and aided by the Christian Arab tribe of Ghassān, was preparing an offensive to repel the Muslim threat to the Southern Levant. Now that the Byzantines had secured a treaty with their Sassanian adversaries, they were able to concentrate on regional threats, and they consequently managed to gather an army of approximately 120,000 professional soldiers in the area north of Tabūk, which is about 700 kilometres north of Medina (See map 22). Although the number of soldiers cannot be substantiated by any credible references, this is not an unrealistic estimate given the fact that, a year earlier during the battle at Mu'tah, the Byzantine garrison in Syria was thought to have been comprised of about 100,000 soldiers[214].

In the summer of AD 630, the Prophet, having first made an effort to advertise his every intended move, marched to Tabūk with an army of about 30,000 volunteers. It has been suggested that many of these people, despite their dedication to Muḥammad, were reluctant to make the journey to Tabūk, as they believed that the height of the Arabian summer was not the most opportune time for carrying out military offences. By the time the Muslims arrived in Tabūk, the Byzantine army and their allies had called off their campaign and

[212] Lings, M., 2007, p 312
[213] Lings, M., 2007, p 323
[214] Ahmed, H., 2006, p 76

retreated north[215]. Their reasons for doing so are unclear, but it may be that they did not believe that Muḥammad would attempt to challenge them during the Arabian summer and it was unfeasible to maintain their presence there while waiting for him, or simply that they had been commanded to regroup elsewhere as part of another military drill. When it became evident that there was no army in Tabūk to meet him, the Prophet concluded a treaty with the people of Tabūk in which they promised not to side against him with any other force. The expedition to Tabūk was the last military campaign led by the Prophet.

When Muḥammad returned to Medina, he was met by a delegation of Arab tribes who had either pledged their loyalty to Muḥammad or embraced Islam. In AD 631, which was considered a year of deputations, 80 of Muḥammad's representatives were sent all over the Arabian Peninsula to sign treaties or negotiate peace settlements, resulting in the signing of a total of 33 agreements[216]. Delegates from other religious and community groups also visited Muḥammad, including 60 representatives of the Christian tribes of Najran and Yemen. These delegates went on to sign the Treaty of Najran, under which they agreed not to side with any other party against Muḥammad, in return for which they were promised that they would be allowed to practise their own faith without interference and maintain their current rights and privileges without fear of oppression or persecution[217].

However, not all of the tribes of Arabia were cooperative with Muḥammad's representatives. The eastern tribes of Bahrain were led by a self-proclaimed prophet called Musaylimah, who believed that he too had received revelations from God with which he had written his own holy book. Musaylimah suggested that he and Muḥammad establish a power-sharing agreement[218]. When Muḥammad emphatically rejected this proposal, Musaylimah rallied his supporters and allied tribes, among them the Sassanians, who were keen to sponsor any anti-Muslim campaign. It was not until after Muḥammad's death that Musaylimah was killed in battle and this potential threat was eliminated. (See map 24)

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[215] Ahmed, H., 2006, p 76
[216] Wintle, J., 2003, p 36
[217] Zahoor, A., 2000, Appx. C
[218] Lings, M., 2007, p 338

2.12. The Death of Muḥammad

In the beginning of the year AD 632, Prophet Muḥammad was finding it very difficult to unify the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula under one banner. Those who did not believe in Islam were not only opposed to the idea of being ruled, but they also saw no reason why they should comply with Muḥammad's economic reforms, which they saw as the first step in establishing a self-financing Islamic state. The collection of zakāt alms was becoming a real challenge for Muḥammad, particularly as these taxes were meant to be paid voluntarily as an act of purification and gratitude for affluence[219]. The concept of charity that Muḥammad was striving to introduce was inconceivable to a group of people who had grown used to living in a society in which the rich were encouraged to hold onto their wealth and the poor were expected to accept their poverty and its consequences.

After making his last pilgrimage to Mecca, Prophet Muḥammad delivered a farewell speech to thousands of his followers in which he urged them to obey God's message. He beseeched them not to be led astray, as other nations who had received prophets had been in the past and, in asking them to be righteous and charitable and to protect the rights of the weak, he was calling for the eradication of sin and injustice. The Prophet emphasised that all mankind originally came from Adam and Eve, who were themselves created from earth, and reminded the people that those of all races and colours would be judged on their actions[220]. During this farewell speech, Muḥammad pointed out that his role as a messenger of God had reached its conclusion, and that he had fulfilled his mission as a prophet. He indicated that after his death the responsibility for interpreting the revelations and living by the laws of the Koran would lie in the hands of the people.

Three months after delivering this speech, the Prophet contracted a fever and died and was buried in his home in Medina[221]. He had achieved a great deal in establishing a well-organised religious community but, as he had left no instructions as to who should be named his successor, the community was plunged into its first real dilemma, as his companions believed that no one was worthy of carrying on his legacy. Abū Bakr, who had

[219] Wintle, J., 2003, p 37
[220] Lings, M., 2007, p 337
[221] Clark, M., 2003, p 91

led the people in prayer during the Prophet's illness[222], tried to reassure them by reciting the following verse from the Koran: "Muḥammad is only a messenger: many are the messengers who have died before him; if he dies, or is slain, will you turn back on your heels?" (3:144) Muḥammad's sudden death created a leadership vacuum, and any expectation of a smooth transition from one administration to the next would have been unrealistic. Most men in positions of leadership would have felt inadequate to the task of carrying on from where a prophet had left off and they would have been tormented by the possibility that they might inadvertently destroy all that Muḥammad had created. It is a testament to Muḥammad that, during this time of bereavement and uncertainty, Arabia did not degenerate into the unlawful society it had been before he brought law and order to the region.

[222] Lings, M., 2007, pp 346, 347

Chapter 3: The Rāshīdūn Period

The aim of this chapter is to shed light on the important period that followed the death of Prophet Muḥammad, during which time the Islamic community came under tremendous pressure. The period from AD 632 to AD 661 is recognised in history as the Rāshīdūn Period, or the period of "the rightly guided caliphs". Four of the Prophet's closest companions, Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān and 'Ali, each of whom was in some way related to the Prophet, consecutively assumed the position of caliph and, despite the challenges that they each faced, the four caliphs managed to push the Islamic faith and its community into a new dimension[223].

The Rāshīdūn period is commonly described as the "Age of Arab Conquest" and the "Age of Arab Invasion". The military conflicts during this time are considered evidence of the Muslims' endeavours to gain power and the spoils of war[224]. The fact is that the Muslims were simply responding to perceived internal and external threats to Islam. Arab Islamic expansion resulted from a combination of military, diplomatic and religious reasons[225].

3.1. The State of World Affairs after the Death of the Prophet

By the time of his death in AD 632, Muḥammad had managed to establish ever-growing Islamic communities in both Mecca and Medina, as well as signing peace treaties with the Arab Christian communities from Tabūk, as far north as Damascus, and as far south as Yemen. This said, the unity that Muḥammad established during his lifetime was based very heavily on the tribal system in which he had been brought up and there was no Islamic state in the sense in which the term is understood today. While Muḥammad was the head of a religious community, he had none of the political influence that was enjoyed by the great powers of the time, nor any regular army or formalised administration[226].

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[223] Wintle, J., 2003, p 42
[224] Armstrong, K., 2002, p 23
[225] Wintle, J., 2003, pp 49, 52
[226] Clark, M., 2003, p 17

The Islamic community, each member of which considered it an honour to offer their time and effort to fulfilling the demands of the Prophet, was financed by the rich and manned by the poor and the Islamic fighting forces consisted solely of volunteers. Although there were only 22 years between Muḥammad's first revelation and his death, his message reached a remarkable number of people during his lifetime and was firmly entrenched within his supporters' minds and institutionalised within their communities[227].

However, although Muḥammad had managed to establish a working peace on the west coast of Arabia, the region as a whole was far from cohesive and united at the time of his death. Indeed, many people felt that Muḥammad's death would mark the end of Islam. While people on the west coast were staunch believers in the faith, some tribes on the east coast had never believed in Muḥammad and argued that if he could be a prophet then it must also be possible for them to have a prophet of their own. There were also tribes that had embraced Islam during Muḥammad's life but, as their oath had been to him as an individual, they had no clause to bind them to the faith or to any successor upon his death and so they reverted to paganism, some refusing to obey the economic tenets of Islam, the zakāt. These groups, who were hostile to the Muslim community on the west coast, were gathering in number and, with the assistance they received from the Sassanians, they managed to become a formidable threat to the Islamic communities of Mecca and Medina[228].

The Byzantine and Sassanian Empires, on the other hand, while recognising the significance of the fall of Mecca, took no immediate action against Muḥammad or his volunteers. Although both empires were uneasy about the rapid emergence of the Islamic faith, which threatened both their power base and their centuries-old structure of authority, they may have been appeased by the fact that they were not being challenged by a formalised state or established political entity, and they were probably confident that they each individually could crush any potential threat from Islam should it develop into a more

[227] Armstrong, K., 2002, p 22
[228] Clark, M., 2003, p 19

formidable antagonist[229]. Perhaps they hoped to exploit divisions within the Muslim community so that its internal dynamics might themselves resolve the problem.

Another reason why the Byzantine and Sassanian Empires failed to take immediate action against Islam and the Arabs was that each empire had long been engaged in fighting with the other and attempts to defuse this constant conflict were the powers' first priority. In AD 612, Sassanian Emperor Khusraw Parvīz was assisted by Jewish tribes rebelling against the Byzantine Empire in successfully occupying Syria and he was able to move the True Cross from Jerusalem to Ctesiphon, the Sassanian winter capital[230]. He went on to occupy Ānatolīā, and made an unsuccessful attempt to besiege Constantinople in AD 615. Byzantine Emperor Heraclius staged a surprise counterattack on the Sassanian Empire via the Armenian highlands in AD 622 then, in AD 626, the Sassanians, with cooperation from the Avārs, from across the Danube, made another unsuccessful attempt to besiege Constantinople. A year later, Heraclius managed to break the siege and move into Mesopotamia as far as Ctesiphon. Emperor Khusraw Parvīz was assassinated and, in an effort to relieve themselves of the strains of this constant warfare, the two empires formed a peace treaty in AD 628. Heraclius' aim was to restore the True Cross to Jerusalem, which he was able to do in AD 630, although he massacred the Jews of Galilee and punished the Monophysite Christians who had earlier sided with the Persians[231]. In the meantime, a plague that swept across Ctesiphon killed Khusraw's son, who was succeeded in AD 632 by Yazdagird III. (See map 23)

3.2. Abū Bakr (AD 632 – AD 634)

3.2.1. Early Life

Abū Bakr, whose real name was 'Abdullāh ibn 'Uthmān, was born in around AD 573, approximately two years after the Prophet. Raised in a wealthy, prominent Meccan merchant family, he was reputed to be of exceptionally good character and grew up to

[229] Hitti, P.K., 2002, p 144
[230] Lewis, B., 2002, p 46
[231] Hitti, P.K., 2002, p 147

become a cloth merchant and a wealthy individual in his own right[232]. Abū Bakr was widely reputed in Medina for his skills of mediation and often used his own money and influence to assist people who were experiencing difficulties. Muḥammad and Abū Bakr were inseparable companions during their youth and, after Muḥammad had received the revelations, Abū Bakr was second only to the Prophet's wife Kadija in embracing Islam, and he became known as al-Ṣiddīq, meaning "the faithful one". When the Muslim community was being persecuted by the Qurayysh, he would buy the slaves who were punished for embracing Islam and use his wealth to help Muslims who had lost their homes and livelihood, his generosity eventually leading to the state of insolvency in which he died[233].

It was Abū Bakr who accompanied the Prophet when he left Mecca for Medina and he also became his constant advisor. The fact that the Prophet never conducted business without his presence prompted the Arabs to refer to him as "The Prophet's minister". The bond between the two was further strengthened when Muḥammad married Abū Bakr's daughter 'Ā'isha, and Abū Bakr always took the side of the Prophet in all his military conflicts (See diagram 4). Although he was outspoken, he was never reported to have made any kind of error of judgement and his articulacy[234], wisdom and farsightedness meant that he was entrusted with the task of recording verses of the Koran and the Prophet's Ḥadīth. The fact that the Prophet appointed Abū Bakr to lead the Muslims in prayer when he himself was terminally ill was perhaps a measure of the esteem in which he was held.

3.2.2. The Succession

The death of Muḥammad in AD 632 presented the Islamic community with an immediate predicament over his succession. Ultimately, it was widely accepted that Abū Bakr, Muḥammad's longest companion, should be the first caliph, but his appointment to the position did not go unchallenged. Those of Muḥammad's companions who had been with him since he received the revelations believed that they best understood the message and could therefore most effectively carry out the Prophet's teachings. The al-Anṣār of Medina,

[232] Ahmed, H., 2006, p 85
[233] Wintle, J., 2003, p 45
[234] Ahmed, H., 2006, p 86

on the other hand, thought that they were more deserving successors as the message would have been lost had it not been for their support for Islam, the Prophet and his companions. A third party claimed that Muḥammad had nominated his son-in-law 'Ali as his successor, despite the commonly held belief that Muḥammad did not name who should follow him[235]. This group, known later as the Shī'ites, which literally means "'Ali's supporters", believed that in the absence of any immediate heirs to Muḥammad, 'Ali was the rightful claimant to the leadership. The Shī'ites were opposed by the other main Islamic group, later known as the Sunnis, who believed that they were following the Prophet's way, under which the caliphate was to be decided by election, as opposed heredity. Abū Bakr's appointment as first caliph therefore caused a rift between the Shī'ites and the Sunnis which has never been satisfactorily resolved[236].

3.2.3. The Riddah Campaign (Apostasy)

The brief period of Abū Bakr's caliphate was not without complications. During the Prophet's last days, it became evident that some of the southern tribes of Yemen and Hadhramaut who had initially embraced Islam had decided that they wished to revert to paganism. Led by a man called al-Ash'ath ibn Qays, they gained the support of all the southern tribes of Arabia. Although this problem resolved itself easily when al-Ash'ath ibn Qays was assassinated and the Hadhramaut and Kindah tribes decided to embrace Islam once again, Abū Bakr then faced more complex challenges. Immediately after his appointment, it became apparent that several groups from the Eastern Arab provinces had taken steps towards renouncing the Islamic faith, as they believed that Islam as they had known it had ended with Muḥammad's death. One of these groups had reverted to paganism, another was now lending its support to others who claimed to be prophets, and the third had remained Muslim but refused to pay zakāt, which they believed to have only been promised to Muḥammad. These groups had decided to combine their strength to mount a military challenge against Abū Bakr in an effort to regain their sense of autonomy[237].

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[235] Wintle, J., 2003, p 43
[236] Clark, M., 2003, p 18
[237] Hitti, P.K., 2002, p 141

Two neighbouring tribes from the east, the Abs and the Thubīān, had reverted to paganism and, refusing allegiance to the first caliph, had become a threat to Medina. Indeed they had already made one attempt to attack Medina during the night but had been thwarted. Abū Bakr feared that others who had recently embraced Islam might be persuaded by the Abs and the Thubīān to join them in renouncing the faith and he considered it his responsibility to save Islam from any such threat. However, as the Muslim army had been sent north under the leadership of a man called Usamah ibn Zayyd to assess the threat from the Byzantines and the extent of their Ghassānid support, Abū Bakr did not have an army at his disposal to deal with the problems in the east and the south[238]. When the Muslim army returned, he requested that they rest and, having by then gained the confidence to confront these threats himself, he gathered a fresh force and went to meet the Abs and the Thubīān and managed to subdue them.

When he felt confident that Usamah ibn Zayyd's army was rested and ready to fight once more, he requested that Usamah divide his army into two in order to deal with the threats arising from other dissenting tribes. In a campaign known as the Riddah, the first group would go south to Najran and Sana to put down a revolt that was being led by a false prophet called Aswad 'Ansi, head of the Qaḥṭān tribe of Yemen who had both support from and family ties with the Sassanians. The other group would go east to Buzakhā, where there was another false prophet, Musaylima, who had ties to the Byzantines, then to Yamama, on to the Bahrain province and south to Oman, and then along the south coast to Hadhramaut to finally meet the first group in Yemen. By bringing the dissidents back under their control, Abū Bakr and the Muslim army succeeded in neutralising the threats from Najd, Bahrain and Oman, as well as those from the tribes of the southern coast, by AD 633. (See map 24)

The fact that many of the false prophets had intermarried with or had other ties with people from the great powers made them a greater threat to the Muslims than they would otherwise have been[239]. There was a long history of collaboration between the empires and some Arab tribes, who understood the historical importance of the Arab provinces to the great powers

[238] Rogerson, B., 2006, p 135
[239] Ahmed, H., 2006, p 90

and knew that any request they made for support against the Muslims would not be denied. Although some of these false prophets surrendered (or were killed, in the case of Musaylima) during the Riddah campaign, others managed to escape and flee north, some going to Syria and some to the Iraq province and others disappearing within the Arabian Peninsula. Knowing that any who reached the great powers would be certain to find support and assistance from the Byzantine or Sassanian forces, Abū Bakr became aware of the urgent need for the Muslims to bring the desert land south of the Fertile Crescent under Muslim control. He therefore decided to create a buffer zone bordered by the west bank of the Euphrates, going all the way to the Syrian Desert and Palmyra, then southwest into Damascus, the Sea of Galilee, the River Jordan and the Dead Sea to Aqaba and Tabūk.

Many Western texts[240] [241]suggest that Riddah was a result of Abū Bakr's rigid interpretation of the teachings of the Koran (Orthodox) in which believers are ordered to fight to the death anyone who renounces the Islamic faith. However, it must be pointed out that the timing and circumstances in which Muḥammad received the revelations and the ways in which he later interpreted them all have a crucial effect upon how any of the Koranic verses should be interpreted. When any individual verse is used as evidence of the true intentions of Islam but the context of that verse has been misunderstood, the Koranic teachings are being wrongfully misused. Although there are suggestions in the Koran about how people who renounce the Islamic faith should be dealt with, there are also references to the tenet that Muslims must be humane and non-violent and tolerant to other faiths.

This would suggest that Koranic teachings have been taken out of context as justification for the Riddah campaign. There was not any religious pretext for fighting the dissidents on the grounds that they had renounced Islam, which is apparent in the fact that those who simply laid down their arms were spared alongside those who returned to Islam. It is simply untrue to suggest that Riddah was a battle against non-believers or that Abū Bakr forced the people to choose between Islam and death. Historical facts all point to the suggestion that Riddah was a political, economic rebellion which initially aimed to destroy Mecca and Medina and had the potential of creating violence and chaos in the rest of Arabia. It

[240] Hitti, P.K., 2002, p 144
[241] Stewart, P.J., 1999, p 123

involved internal agitators who had considerable support from outside forces, as well as people who were prepared to take arms against the Muslims if they did not get things their own way. Had Abū Bakr not acted in pre-emptive self defence and contained the Riddah uprising, it would have had incalculable consequences, almost certainly involving civil war and unrest.

It has been suggested that the Riddah can be considered the first civil war *(Fitna)* since the death of Muḥammad but this would be to suggest that Arabia had become a cohesive, converted whole which subsequently broke into factions immediately following the death of the Prophet. This was not the case. It would also imply that the campaign involved all or much of the country, whereas the fighting actually only took place in a few areas. Given that the attempt to spread Muḥammad's message had only been active for 22 years and that the region was large and inhabited by a number of different tribes whose communication methods were varied, it is more likely that the conversion of the Arabian Peninsula to Islam was far from complete and that many of those who had accepted Muḥammad's message had not had the time to fully absorb what the message meant and integrate it into their lives and their mentalities. Rather than being a unified whole, the tribes, many of whom respected Muḥammad, accepted peace treaties and agreements and lived in peaceful coexistence during his time. So when Muḥammad died, the respected instigator of this peaceful cohabitation no longer existed and a number of tribes returned to their previous attitudes, no longer feeling obliged to adhere to agreements which they did not deem viable without the credible leadership Muḥammad provided.

The Riddah campaign could be better described as a rebellion. It must also be pointed out that the agitators were not entirely representative even of their own local communities and that their motives were political and economic[242]. When they and their supporters had been eliminated, the population returned to a state of harmony in which the various religious communities were respected and the people were once again free to carry on their lives as normal. At this stage, Arabia was still not unified and homogenised. It was not until the rule of later caliphs that this kind of cohesion existed and, even then, it was not universal. The only victims of the Riddah campaign were those who had chosen to take arms. In its

[242] Armstrong, K., 2002, p 22

aftermath, there were no reports of mass execution, mass migration, the confiscation of wealth or the destruction of the infrastructure, and no suggestion that villages were burnt or crops ravaged, neither is there any historical evidence to suggest that the people were embittered by the campaign or that there was any animosity between the Muslims and the local communities.

3.2.4. The Military Campaign in Iraq and Syria

After the Riddah uprising was subdued and Islamic control of Arabia was consolidated, Abū Bakr began to feel that it was just a matter of time before the Sassanians would once again try to win support in the Eastern province of Arabia. He envisaged that the best way to protect what he had consolidated in Arabia was to venture into the land adjacent to the Euphrates River up to the Syrian Desert and then turn westbound and do the same along the River Jordan all the way to Tabūk, attempting along the way to assemble all the Arab tribes and kingdoms under the Islamic banner. He therefore sent Khālid ibn al-Walīd to Basra in the south of the Iraq province, where he was to assess the strength of the Sassanians and their support from the Lakhmīd kingdom[243]. (See map 24)

While Khālid was under instruction not to recruit any of the Arab tribes who had revolted against Islam, as Abū Bakr did not feel that their faith was strong enough to be part of the Muslim army, one of his tasks was to present the Lakhmīds with options concerning their own allegiances. The Lakhmīds were offered the choice of embracing Islam and joining the Muslims, remaining Christian and paying a tribute tax for protection (jiziyah) or confronting the Muslims in battle. While some Lakhmīd tribes responded to this choice by signing a peace treaty with Khālid, others called for military assistance from the Sassanians who, underestimating the size of the Muslim force, sent a small unit. The Muslims first encountered resistance south of Basra, then met a Sassanian unit in an area north of Basra called Walaja, where Khālid killed the unit's leader in a duel and the rest of the force retreated. As Khālid progressed further north, different Arab tribes would call for assistance from the Sassanians, who continued to send small units which would retreat as soon as their

[243] Wintle, J., 2003, p 47

leader was killed. Some references suggest that there were large Sassanian casualties in these battles, but no figures are available.

As part of the same campaign, Abū Bakr had ordered 'Ayyad ibn Muginem to travel through the Syrian Desert with the intention that he would come out in the north of Iraq and meet with Khālid in al-Anbār. However, 'Ayyad ibn Muginem met fierce resistance from the Arab tribes in Domat al-Jandal, and was not able to progress any further. Khālid, meanwhile, had managed to win the support of al-Basra before moving on to Walaja. He then fought a battle south of the Lakhmīd capital of Hirah, then besieged the city itself and finally made a peace treaty with its people. He then went north to al-Anbār, and onto Ain al-Tamr, after which he travelled west through the Syrian Desert to assist 'Ayyad ibn Muginem in Domat al-Jandal in AD 633[244]. (See map 24)

At the time that Khālid was entering Domat al-Jandal, Abū Bakr had decided to send out another expeditionary group, this time to assess the Byzantine forces and their support from their Arab allies, the Ghassānid. The group was also to try to win the support of the Arabs in Syria, thus undermining any future attempts by the Byzantines to involve themselves in the internal politics of Arabia. In AD 634 Abū Bakr appointed to the task four of his most trusted companions, each of whom had been widely reputed for military competence. He assigned 'Amr ibn al-'Ās to the Palestinian Naqab Desert, Shūraḥbīl ibn Ḥasanah to the Jordanian Desert, Yazīd ibn abī-Sufyān to the outskirts of Damascus and Abū 'Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrāḥ to Hims. Each member of this force was to enter the Syrian/Palestinian Desert and eventually meet in a place north of Damascus[245]. (See map 24)

The Muslims forces, estimated to have been comprised of between 20,000 and 25,000 people, marched on the Tabūk to Maan trade route into the Palestinian Desert and had their first skirmish with a Byzantine force at Wadi 'Araba, south of the Dead Sea. They then moved on to Qayṣariyah and Gaza. The Muslim forces wrote to Abū Bakr asking him to command Khālid to join them once he had completed his campaign at Domat al-Jandal and,

[244] Hitti, P.K., 2002, p 150
[245] Hitti, P.K., 2002, p 148

in AD 634, they had their first major encounter with a small Byzantine force in a place southwest of Jerusalem called Ajnadain, in which Khālid played a major part (See map 25). The Byzantine forces were taken by surprise and defeated, but were able to send word to Heraclius about what was afoot.

When Heraclius received this news in Jerusalem, he felt that it was just a matter of time before these forces gathered momentum and gained a strong enough foothold in the Syrian Desert to attack the Byzantine Empire, so he decided to assemble his troops and meet each of the five groups individually. The five Muslim military leaders had decided that perhaps the best way to challenge the Byzantines was to unite in Jordan and wait for the Byzantine forces to meet them, so that if they were able to defeat them they could move forward, and if they were conquered they could retreat to the desert. They chose to gather by a river called Yarmuk that feeds into the River Jordan, which runs through a very steep valley, and were subsequently granted Abū Bakr's approval for that decision. A scout brought the news that Heraclius was mounting a huge army, whose number is estimated to have been anywhere between 150,000 and 250,000 professional soldiers. (See map 25)

Western references[246] often suggest that Abū Bakr had intended to invade, occupy and dominate the vast territories of the Sassanian and Byzantine Empires in order to gain access to their affluence and wealth to finance his dreams of empire building. The fact is, however, that far from being a power-seeker intent on paving the way for empire, Abū Bakr's only objectives were to neutralise the external military threat and to continue Muḥammad's task of spreading the message of Islam. Even if Abū Bakr had wished to mount a military campaign against the empires, the massive number of volunteers that would have been required to do so could not have been mustered from within the relatively sparse population of Arabia, especially after the Riddah campaign, and the tribal people did not, in any case, have any tendency to leave behind their ancestral homelands in pursuit of better lifestyles elsewhere. The only way Abū Bakr could have mounted military campaigns, therefore, was by taking advantage of the local support of the Arab populations living under the great powers, who were disenchanted with centuries of occupation. Abū Bakr was therefore

[246] Lewis, B., 2002, p 50

successful in his campaign against imperial armies who the local population were keen to see overthrown.

3.2.5. Abū Bakr's Death

Before the full onslaught of the Yarmuk engagement, Abū Bakr contracted a fever and was bedridden for two weeks, at which time he asked 'Umar to lead the people in prayer and suggested that 'Umar should succeed him as caliph. The Muslim community unanimously agreed to support this appointment, perhaps because there was no time to debate the issue during those testing times, when all the Muslim forces were occupied in the north. In the beginning of August AD 634, Abū Bakr died and was buried in his daughter 'Ā'isha's house, next to the Prophet.

3.2.6. Achievements

Despite the fact that he held the position of caliph for only two years before his death in AD 634, Abū Bakr was an important leader, and one who was well-chosen for the times in that he was able to defuse the potential leadership crises and military uprisings that took place following the death of the Prophet. He was successful in neutralising all domestic threats to achieve relative unity in Arabia under an Islamic banner for the first time and he prevented any foreign influence, be it Byzantine or Sassanian or even Axumite, from aiding division from within Arabia. Abū Bakr also played an important role in securing Islam's place in Arabia by recognising the importance of developing a sophisticated system of governance with a centralised administration controlling autonomous provinces. He appointed a governor for each province, and suggested that the performance of every governor should be checked on a regular basis and that they should be replaced whenever deemed necessary, as the interests of the people should come before the personal interests of the appointed bureaucrats.

Abū Bakr was also the first to compile a complete written volume of the Koran, a volume which was to become known as the Koran Zayd ibn Thābit. Before its completion, Abū Bakr ensured that it was checked against the memory of the Prophet's companions to

guarantee that it was not corrupted. Abū Bakr also set a precedent by ruling that no Muslim caliph should ever engage in business outside of his role as caliph, for the fear that it might divert his attention from his responsibilities and make him vulnerable to earthly temptations. Abū Bakr also created a sophisticated treasury, called Bayt al-Māl, which was always to be under the direct control of the caliph, and the expansion of which should always be in accordance with the teachings of Muḥammad and the Koran. He also utilised these funds to equip the volunteer army in order to bring their state of readiness to the highest possible level.

3.3. 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (AD 634 – AD 644)

3.3.1. Early Life

'Umar, whose full name was ''Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb al-Nafīl, was born in AD 586, 13 years after the Prophet. 'Umar was well brought up and was known for his strength, eloquence, straightforwardness and outspokenness, if not for his diplomacy or willingness to compromise. During his youth, 'Umar was known for his spirited behaviour and love of fighting and hunting. He once had an encounter with Khālid ibn al-Walīd in which the two wrestled and 'Umar's leg was broken. There had always been considerable animosity and a strong sense of competition between the two young men and their relationship became understandably cold and distant after this incident. 'Umar was part of a family of successful trading merchants and grew up to become a prominent member of the Qurayysh tribe and a trading merchant in his own right. He was eventually appointed as an ambassador for the Qurayysh and used his courage and decisiveness to mediate on the Qurayysh's behalf whenever a conflict arose between them and other tribes[247].

'Umar was vehemently opposed to Islam in the early stages of its message and he joined the rest of the Qurayysh in their unrelenting persecution of the early Muslims. 'Umar was baffled when people close to him chose to embrace the faith, and actually became physically violent when he learned that his sister Fāṭīma (not to be confused with the Prophet's daughter Fāṭīma) and her husband Sa'id ibn Zayd had become Muslim. 'Umar

[247] Ahmed, H., 2006, p 95

had been intent on publicly slaying Prophet Muḥammad but Fāṭīma pleaded with him to listen to a recital of the Koran, saying that she would allow him to go and kill the Prophet if he remained unaffected by its message[248].

'Umar was very affected by his first introduction to what he believed to be the strange and sweet Arabic language of the Koran, so much so that he changed his mind about the Islamic faith and went to visit Prophet Muḥammad, not to slay him but to surrender to him and embrace his religion and, in AD 618, he became the first prominent Meccan to announce publicly, next to the Ka'ba, that he had embraced Islam. When he made the Hijrah from Mecca to Medina to join the Prophet, he did so in full armour, challenging anybody from the Qurayysh to stop him, which, knowing his reputation as a confrontational, fearless, formidable fighter with an explosive temper, they did not.

From that time on, 'Umar was second only to Abū Bakr in his closeness to Muḥammad[249]. Indeed, the Prophet later married 'Umar's daughter Ḥafṣah, by which act he was, under the tribal system, honouring 'Umar by putting him on an equal footing with Abū Bakr, whose daughter he had also married (See diagram 5). As one of Muḥammad's trusted advisors, he would often make suggestions which would subsequently be confirmed by revelations received by the Prophet. While he is said to have acted strictly towards his own family out of fear that people would perceive him as soft, he did display a more compassionate side of himself in his dealings with the poor and destitute. He spent most of his money and much of his time taking care of the homeless and underprivileged.

'Umar was the first man to rally behind Abū Bakr during the early succession problems and he also called on other Muslims from Mecca and Medina to lend him their support and loyalty. When Abū Bakr took power, he made 'Umar his right-hand man and sought his opinion on all matters. 'Umar worked with Abū Bakr in subduing the Riddah uprising and participated in the compilation of the first complete written version of the Koran. Abū Bakr then appointed 'Umar to the position of chief justice and aided him in the selection of the local governors.

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[248] Clark, M., 2003, p 19
[249] Clark, M., 2003, p 21

3.3.2. Succession

During his last days, Abū Bakr was anxious that he should put the issue of succession to rest, as he knew that unless the matter was properly resolved before his death, problems would emerge in the same way that they had when he was elected and there was too much at stake in Arabia and elsewhere to allow that to be the case. As the majority of potential candidates for the role were taking part in military campaigns in Syria and elsewhere at the time, Abū Bakr had just two main candidates in mind for his succession – 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, and the Prophet's cousin 'Ali ibn abī-Ṭālib. Many factors played a part in Abū Bakr's eventual decision, one of them being his concern about 'Ali's comparative youth and inexperience. Abū Bakr believed that 'Umar was dispassionate about whether or not he should be appointed to the caliphate, which would give him an advantage over 'Ali, who had been anxious to assume the commanding role since the Prophet's death and might therefore be more susceptible to the trappings of power. Abū Bakr may also have been concerned that if 'Ali was appointed, it may have given the people the impression that the appointment was the result of favouritism on the basis of heredity, given the family ties between 'Ali and Muḥammad.

Abū Bakr consulted all his colleagues, advisors and close friends about which of the two they thought best suited to the position, and a decision was reached unanimously that they preferred 'Umar to 'Ali due to his experience and suitability for the times, in which most of the Muslim army was engaged in the north and the Riddah revolution had just recently been subdued. There was not an official election on the matter and it was through a sort of tribal council that a unanimous decision was reached, written down and ratified. When Abū Bakr endorsed 'Umar as his successor, 'Umar went to the mosque and announced that he had been given the position of caliph, promising that he would follow the Prophet's path and try to lead the Muslims in a just and sensible manner.

3.3.3. The Levant Campaign

By the time 'Umar became caliph, the Muslim army had already experienced limited engagements with the Byzantine forces in the area south of Jerusalem, having first rooted

out Byzantine resistance in Ajnadain[250]. Before Abū Bakr's death, the Muslims had planned to gather south of Damascus to wait for the Byzantine forces to meet them from the north. These forces did not materialise, however, and the Muslims left the area, with Khālid ibn al-Walīd going to Busra, one of the Ghassānid capitals, and defeating a Ghassānid tribe which had allied itself with the Byzantines. He then went on to Hawrān and, in AD 635, he besieged Damascus for a period of six months, after which time the city surrendered unconditionally and agreed to a peace treaty under which all of the city's inhabitants were assured of their right to practise their religion and keep their wealth and possessions. They also agreed to pay a poll tax, the amount of which was dependent upon what each individual could afford, be it one dinar or one measure of wheat.

It has been suggested that the grandfather of the famous Jacobite Christian known as John of Damascus played a significant part in the peaceful surrender of the city to Khālid ibn al-Walīd. His grandfather, Manṣūr ibn Sarjūn, was a prominent figure in the Christian community of Damascus, a group which remained separate from the Byzantine church. He held the hereditary position of chief financial officer to the city. He is thought to have believed that the Christian people would benefit from a peaceful coexistence with the Muslims and, along with the Bishop of the city, he therefore negotiated with the Muslims to establish the terms of the peace treaty, which were also applied when the city of Hims surrendered to the Muslims later in the same year. Manṣūr ibn Sarjūn's family's involvement with the Muslims continued into the Umayyad Period, when John of Damascus became a close companion to Yazīd ibn Mu'āwiyah, who was later to become caliph[251]. The fact that John of Damascus' family continued to hold its hereditary office through three generations of Muslim rule would suggest that the Arabs' intentions were not to loot and conquer cities and take over their administration but only to remove military threats to Islam. In most cases they allowed the inhabitants of the cities that came under their control to run their own lives under the auspices of the civil authorities of their choice.

In the summer of AD 636, the Byzantine army, which by now numbered approximately 120,000 and was led by Emperor Heraclius's brother Theodore, finally made its way

[250] Wintle, J., 2003, p 48
[251] Hitti, P.K., 2002, p 150

towards Yarmuk to participate in a decisive battle with the Muslims, who had gathered an army of 40,000 volunteers. Knowing the terrain of the Yarmuk, the Muslims had chosen to assemble on the south-eastern side of the river, with their flank to the desert (See map 25). The Byzantines, not knowing how steep the northwest side of the river was, approached from that direction, which proved to be a huge military blunder that demonstrated the Byzantines' inability to assess the battlefield before the battle commenced. By approaching from this direction, they became a simple target for the Muslim archers and further casualties were amassed as a result of the fact that the incoming troops were completely unaware of the fate that was befalling the regiments that had gone before them.

The Muslims, who were extremely motivated and whose morale was high, were able to defeat the professional Byzantine army, which had underestimated its enemy and fallen victim to a major tactical error by its leadership. Theodore took half of the few surviving Byzantine troops and fled to Alexandria, choosing that city because the economy of Egypt was under the control of the Byzantine garrison stationed there and Theodore would be able to regroup, gather fresh supplies and assemble more troops, perhaps from Constantinople or Cyprus, and perhaps launch another campaign from the Egyptian coast. Heraclius retreated north to Antioch with the other half of the troops, leaving Jerusalem and the rest of Syria completely defenceless[252].

Despite his decisive victory at the Battle of Yarmuk, Khālid was discharged from his position as military commander following that confrontation. Perhaps swayed by the old animosity between them, 'Umar began to worry that the army's admiration for Khālid might prevent them from taking orders from anyone other than him. He also feared that the people under his protection might favour him over the caliph in Medina, which would spark another division between the Muslims. Khālid is said to have willingly conceded to 'Umar's decision. He remained in Hims until his death in AD 642[253].

In AD 637, Jerusalem was besieged by the Muslim army, which was then being led by Abū 'Ubaydah. The head of the Christian church in Jerusalem would only surrender to the

[252] Hitti, P.K., 2002, p 153
[253] Wintle, J., 2003, p 54

Muslims on the condition that 'Umar himself visit the city and promise the people that Jerusalem and all its relics and houses of worship would be spared. 'Umar, in an act of humility and keen to not be perceived as a conqueror but rather as someone with a similar role to his host, rode a donkey from Medina to Jerusalem accompanied only by a servant and, when he arrived in Jerusalem, he was received by Pope Sophronius of the Church of the Sepulchre and given the key to the city[254]. During his visit 'Umar prayed on the site at the top of a hill which 50 years later became home to the al-Aqṣa mosque. The building of this mosque caused considerable controversy, as the Jews claimed that they had had a temple on the site until it was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70 following the Jewish rebellion. A counterclaim is made against this assertion, however, by historians who claim that there were no Jews in the city at that time as a result of expulsions by various Roman and Byzantine leaders. Heraclius himself is said to have massacred the Jews of Galilee when he returned to Jerusalem to restore the True Cross several years earlier.

After securing Jerusalem, the Muslims kept pushing north by the sea and by the Syrian midlands and, by AD 639, they had managed to secure Aleppo, Antioch and a large part of Armenia and establish a frontier on the Asia Minor border. They had therefore managed to subdue all of the Levant i.e. Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine. 'Umar appointed Mu'āwiyah ibn Abū Sufyān as governor of Syria[255]. (See map 25)

In AD 638, a plague swept through the provinces of Iraq and Syria and many people, Christians, Jews and Muslims alike, perished as a result. Fearing that the plague might find its way to Arabia, 'Umar decreed that the people should leave the cities and head for the high terrain, not returning until the plague had ended. Many of 'Umar's commanders died during the plague, including Abū 'Ubaydah and Yazīd, and ''Umar put 'Amr ibn al-'Ās in charge of Syrian affairs until he himself inspected the area in AD 639 and supervised its administration. The plague halted the Muslims' initiative to capitalise on their success in Yarmuk by chasing Theodore before he had a chance to rearm and attack again from the Egyptian coast[256].

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[254] Hitti, P.K., 2002, p 154
[255] Zahoor, A., 2000, p 38
[256] Zahoor, A., 2000, p 38

3.3.4. The Egyptian Campaign

When the plague had subsided in AD 638, ''Umar decided to visit Syria and meet with 'Amr ibn al-'Ās. He expressed his fear that the Byzantine fleets from Cyprus and Constantinople and the garrison in Alexandria still posed a great deal of danger to the Muslims. He did not believe that the Byzantines would rest until they had attempted to reclaim Jerusalem, and thought that they might try to invade from the north and from Egypt. However, he was reluctant to engage in a battle at this time, fearing the loss of even more Muslim lives and feeling that the Levant was not yet fully secured and consolidated. 'Amr ibn al-'Ās was able to convince 'Umar that it was in the Muslims' best interests to chase Theodore to Alexandria to gain the advantage over him before he was able to capitalise on their hesitation.

'Amr ibn al-'Ās had visited Egypt on trade missions in the past and had a thorough knowledge of its terrain and its deep-rooted Byzantine influence and of the strained relations between the Byzantines and the Egyptian Coptic Christians. Taking 4,000 Muslim volunteers, 'Amr ibn al-'Ās started out from Qayṣariyah, went on to Gaza, then followed the coastal route to a place called Arish, finding no major resistance. In AD 640 he crossed the Sinai Desert and went to Heliopolis (northeast of modern-day Cairo), where he was confronted by a 20,000-strong Byzantine garrison at the Castle of Babylon, which was being led by Theodore and supported by Cyrus, the Archbishop of Alexandria, a representative of the Byzantine Emperor (See map 25). This force halted 'Amr ibn al-'Ās' advancement and prompted him to seek assistance from the Egyptian Coptic Christians and also to call for another 4,000 Muslim volunteers to join him from Syria. After a long siege and fierce fighting, the Castle of Babylon fell to the Muslims and, while the Byzantine troops fled to Alexandria, 'Amr ibn al-'Ās augmented his forces with an additional 4,000 volunteers.

The Muslims then marched on to Alexandria, which was the base of the Byzantine navy and the gateway to North Africa. Here they met extremely fierce opposition from Theodore's troops and required additional support, so another 4,000 volunteers were sent from Syria. 'Amr ibn al-'Ās' army engaged the 50,000-strong Byzantine garrison, which was supported by the Byzantine navy and, although the Muslims had not a single ship, no siege machinery and no immediate source of supplies of men, they managed to besiege Alexandria for four months until it finally surrendered in AD 642[257]. Al-Muqawqis, who was the ruler of Egypt under Byzantine Emperor Heraclius and also the head of the Christian Coptic Church, agreed to sign a peace treaty with the Arabs, under the terms of which the Byzantine garrison was to leave Alexandria, leaving behind 150 soldiers and 50 commanders as a guarantee of their departure, and never return.

It is said that one of the reasons why al-Muqawqis wished to have peace with the Muslims, aside from his disenchantment to the Byzantine occupiers, was an incident that had taken place before the Castle of Bābalyūn fell to the Muslims. Before reaching Bābalyūn, 'Amr ibn al-'Ās had besieged a trading post northeast of Heliopolis called Bilbees, where al-Muqawqis ' daughter Qīrs had stopped to break her journey to Qayṣariyah, where she was to marry Heraclius' son Constantine. After rooting out the 5,000 Byzantine soldiers who were supposed to be defending the trading post, 'Amr ibn al-'Ās returned Qīrs to her father with all her slaves, jewellery and possessions. Having proven, therefore, that he was fighting the Byzantine powers but not the populations that lived under them, 'Amr ibn al-'Ās won the support of al-Muqawqis and his people[258].

Once Alexandria had fallen to the Muslims, 'Umar appointed 'Amr ibn al-'Ās as the governor of Egypt, who established a new city and called it Fūstat, which today is known as Cairo. The fall of Alexandria opened North Africa up to the Muslims, and the next army

[257] Wintle, J., 2003, p 54
[258] Wintle, J., 2003, p 55

they were forced to face was a Roman garrison which confronted them in Tunisia in AD 647[259].

3.3.5. The Mesopotamia Campaign

No sooner had the Battle of Yarmuk ended than news travelled to Caliph 'Umar about Sassanian King Yazdagird III, who was newly appointed, young and ambitious, and wished to consolidate his own powers and restore the Sassanian Empire to its former glory. Yazdagird wished to regain all that the Sassanian Empire had lost to the Muslims and, to that end, was planning a surprise offensive on all the cities that had been secured by Khālid ibn al-Walīd. He was encouraged by the fact that the bulk of the Muslim army was engaged in the Levant and also by the knowledge that the leader of the remaining security force, al-Muthana ibn Ḥārithah, was not only inexperienced, having been appointed by Khālid ibn al-Walīd just three years earlier, but also lacked support. Yazdagird was also reassured by the victory that the Sassanians had secured in the Battle of the Bridge in AD 635[260]. During this battle, which took place over the Euphrates River southeast of Hirah, the famous Sassanian commander Rustam had inflicted injuries upon al-Muthana ibn Ḥārithah from which he later died and had forced the rest of the Muslim army to retreat into the desert. 12,000 Sassanian soldiers, led by General Mehrān, chased the retreating Muslim forces and met them in al-Buwayb. Despite their small number and the fact that they were fleeing from a lost battle with an injured commander, the retreating Muslim army managed to regroup and fought until Mehrān was killed and his army was forced to flee to Ctesiphon[261].

Despite the setback at al-Buwayb, Yazdagird was still confident that Rustam was capable of securing a final victory over the Muslims. He therefore endeavoured to assemble the largest force that he could muster, and managed to gather together approximately 30,000 troops, armed with elephants. In the meantime, 'Umar had sent Sa'ad ibn abi Waqqās to replace al-Muthana ibn Ḥārithah, and had provided him with 10,000 fresh Muslim troops, the large majority of whom were volunteers from Yemen. The two forces met at al-

[259] Wintle, J., 2003, p 57
[260] Ahmed, H., 2006, p 96
[261] Hitti, P.K., 2002, p 155

Qadisiyya, south of Hirah, and in a decisive battle, the Persian army was defeated and Rustam was killed. Sad pursued the fleeing Sassanian army to Ctesiphon, which had been abandoned by its king, and when Ctesiphon fell, the rest of the Sassanian cities, including Cyrus, Takrit, Mosul and Karkissa, also collapsed, and the Muslim control over the Iraq province was secured. Sad chased what was left of Yazdagird's forces into Khurāsān, where his request for assistance from the Chinese Emperor Taizong was denied[262]. 'Umar, having established that chasing the Sassanian resistance into Asia was a very difficult undertaking, ordered that Kufa and Basra should be made into strong Muslim garrison posts to fend off any potential threat from the east. In AD 642, what was left of the Sassanian army was defeated in the Battle of Nahrawan. Sa'ad was appointed governor of Kufa[263]. (See map 25)

During 'Umar's last days, the Muslim army managed to advance eastward into Afghanistan, first seizing the Persian city of Herat, and later Balūchistān and Sind on the edge of the Indian sub-continent. The Persian ruler of Hormuz was defeated and later visited Medina to meet Caliph 'Umar and embrace Islam. With the fall of Hormuz, the cities of Ahwāz and Sus were also secured and, in AD 638, Jazirah and Khuzistān also fell under Muslim control. Although there had historically been racial animosity between the Arabs and the Persians, the Arabs did not wish for their presence to disturb the local people's deep sense of identity, history and pride. 'Ali ibn Abū Ṭālib's son Ḥusayn married Yazdagird III's daughter, Shahr Banū, in the hope of quelling any ill feeling between the Arab and Persian communities, and inter-community marriage was also encouraged by the fact that Persians who married Muslims were not obliged to pay the poll tax, and could continue to practise their own faith of Zoroastrianism[264].

In AD 642, Caliph 'Umar sent Mālik ibn Dīnār as an envoy to the King of Malabar in southwest India, and there Mālik established a trading post and the first Muslim community in India. By the end of that year, the cities of Nahrawan, Hamadān, Iṣfahān and Darband had all fallen under Muslim control and, by the end of AD 644, the Muslim forces had

[262] Zahoor, A., 2000, p 37
[263] Wintle, J., 2003, p 54
[264] Zahoor, A., 2000, p 40

defeated the Sind king in Makran, and were pushing the boundaries ever eastward into Indian territories[265]. (See map 25)

Yazdagird III was killed by one of his own people in Marw, in the far eastern corner of Khurāsān in AD 650, and his death marked the end of the imperialistic dynasty of the Sassanian Empire[266]. By the time of 'Umar's death, then, all of Persia and Afghanistan and part of India were completely subdued, which paved the way for Islam to move into China and other Southeast Asian provinces.

3.3.6. 'Umar's Death

The death of a great leader very often creates a power vacuum that his successors find difficult to fill and, in 'Umar's case, the controversial circumstances surrounding his death made this vacuum all the more apparent to those who survived him. In AD 644, after he had led the people in prayer one evening, 'Umar was stabbed by Abū Lū'lū'h Fīrūz, a Persian servant of the governor of Basra. He did not die immediately, but survived long enough to put forward the names of ten potential candidates for his succession. While Muḥammad's cousin 'Ali was on this list, he was once again passed over for the position of caliph when the council's deliberations resulted in the choice of 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān and suspicions arose that 'Ali's supporters may somehow have been involved in 'Umar's death[267]. It was widely understood that the Persians favoured 'Ali for the position of caliph, as they saw him as the most sympathetic to Persian concerns, and some people therefore suspect that 'Umar's assassin may have been paving the way for 'Ali's appointment. Others theorise, however, that 'Uthmān's supporters, who did not wish to see stronger connections between the Persians and the Muslims, may have arranged 'Umar's assassination by a Persian for the precise reason of casting suspicion over 'Ali and his supporters, thereby eliminating him from the caliph candidacy. In any case, 'Uthmān was chosen over 'Ali, and the old resentments that resurfaced created political difficulties for him that continued throughout his entire command[268].

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[265] Zahoor, A., 2000, p 39
[266] Wintle, J., 2003, p 58
[267] Clark, M., 2003, p 21
[268] Ahmed, H., 2006, p 109

3.3.7. Achievements

Despite being known as Amīr al-Mu'minīn, meaning "Commander of the Faithful," 'Umar is remembered more for his military leadership than his spiritual guidance. In recognising and confronting external military threats and neutralising the professional armies of the great powers, he became the first to expand the realm of Islam outside of the Arabian Peninsula and into Africa and Asia[269].

Another of 'Umar's achievements was that he upgraded the administrative structure that had first been implemented by Abū Bakr. 'Umar ordered a census of all Muslim territories, and instructed the treasury, Bayt al-Māl, to allocate trust funds to the surviving members of the Prophet's family, the Hāshimites, out of respect to the house of the Prophet[270]. He also appointed 'Ali ibn abī-Ṭālib as chief justice, and set up a council of advisors (al-Shūra) made up of the Prophet's surviving companions, who he would regularly consult with regard to the issues that arose during the course of his caliphate. 'Umar was extremely wary of those he appointed to govern the provinces, and would often send people to check on the governors to ensure that they were not profiteering from their position[271].

'Umar was known as a fair and caring caliph, who was prepared to alter Islamic law to accommodate time and circumstance. For example, when famine hit Mecca and Medina, he repealed the law that stated that the hands of thieves should be cut off, as he knew that people were being forced to take desperate measures to ensure the survival of their families. He was extremely tolerant of all religions and considerate of the position of non-Muslims living under Muslim rule. He was known to have abolished the poll tax in the Persian provinces in order to avoid an uprising and also to have ensured that different religious communities had their own places of worship and protection against persecution from other communities. 'Umar thereby won the approval and loyalty of the inhabitants of the former empires, whether Christian, Jewish or Zoroastrian. As the people had been used to living

[269] Clark, M., 2003, p 20
[270] Clark, M., 2003, p 20
[271] Wintle, J., 2003, p 49

under repressive regimes, they were relieved by the conduct of the Muslims, and were therefore attracted to Islam[272].

It has been claimed that a number of years after the Muslim takeover of Syria, 'Umar expelled the Jews and Christians from Arabia in AD 641[273]. It must be pointed out, however, that this claim has no logical or archaeological foundation. Had 'Umar intended to persecute or expel non-Muslims from Arabia, he would surely have done so from the earliest days of his caliphate. The fact is that many of the non-Muslims living in Arabia had ended up in that region as a result of having had to flee from Roman persecution in their homelands. Far from being expelled from Arabia by 'Umar, people such as the Jews of Khaybar and the Christians of Najran found themselves supported by the Muslims in their efforts to return to the lands from which they had been exiled. For two years before their departure, 'Umar negated their poll taxes and when they left they were compensated for the loss of their homes, land and possessions and 'Umar advised the governors of the provinces to which they were returning, such as Jerusalem and Iraq, to treat them with extreme leniency. The fact is that after these few groups had left Arabia, other Jews and Christians remained in the region and lived in harmony with the Muslims, who had nothing to fear from non-Muslim communities.

'Umar established the first civilian police, al-'As'ās, who would patrol the streets day and night to ensure that thieves and bandits were not able to prey on the weak, destitute and hopeless, and set up a special unit to guarantee that market sellers were not cheating their customers. 'Umar always made himself available to listen to people's complaints, regardless of their wealth or social standing, and he was extremely vigilant about how Muslim money from Bayt al-Māl was spent. It is also reported that before his death he gave all of his own personal wealth to charity.

'Umar was known for sleeping little and working a lot, and for taking an interest in even the smallest details of his command, ensuring that even the most distant troops were able to benefit from his attention. 'Umar was a direct and idealistic individual, who never put his

[272] Clark, M., 2003, p 20
[273] Wintle, J., 2003, p 50

own personal life, friends or family interests over those of others, and was therefore able to gain the respect of those he ruled over, which unfortunately cannot be said of the two caliphs who succeeded him. He was famous for his impartiality, fairness, firmness, dynamism and dominance, all of which are demonstrated in an often-told story about how 'Amr ibn al-'Ās son beat and lashed an Egyptian Copt who had defeated him in a horse race, arguing that the Copt should have known not to beat the son of a nobleman. When the Egyptian travelled to Medina and complained to 'Umar of the incident, 'Umar was furious and summoned both 'Amr ibn al-'Ās and his son to Medina, and ordered the Egyptian to beat the son. He is said to have asked 'Amr ibn al-'Ās, "When did you enslave the people after they had been born free?"

3.4. 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān (AD 644 – AD 656)

With the death of 'Umar in AD 644, the rapid expansion of the Islamic world was temporarily halted and its unity was tested. 'Uthmān, who was chosen as 'Umar's successor by a council of Muḥammad's companions, was Muḥammad's son-in-law and also a distant relative of the powerful Umayyad family, who would later build the first Islamic dynasty. This appointment led to discontent among those Muslims who still considered 'Ali to be the rightful appointee[274].

3.4.1. Early Life

'Uthmān ibn 'Affān ibn Abi al-'Ās was born in AD 575, five years after the Prophet, into a wealthy ruling Qurayysh family in Mecca, and was closely related to Abū Sufyān through the Qurayyshi Umayyad clan. 'Uthmān was raised in an affluent, successful merchant tradition, and was a wealthy individual before and after he embraced Islam through an introduction to the faith from Abū Bakr. 'Uthmān was a member of one of the first groups of Muslims to flee persecution from the Qurayysh and seek refuge in Abyssinia. Through successive marriages to two of the Prophet's daughters, Kulthūm and Ruqayyah, he became

[274] Clark, M., 2003, p 21

the son-in-law of Muḥammad, although both of his wives died shortly after marrying him. (See diagram 6)

'Uthmān fought on the side of the Prophet in all his battles with the Qurayysh, with the exception of the Battle of Badr, which took place when he was at the side of his dying wife, Ruqayyah. During the incident at Hudaybiyyah, 'Uthmān became the Prophet's envoy to the Qurayysh and was instrumental in negotiating the terms of the peace treaty. 'Uthmān also played an important role in supporting the volunteers in Tabūk by supplying them with horses and money, and also by buying water wells from the Jews of Khaybar to assist them in their journeys. 'Uthmān was considered one of the finest at reciting the Koran, his knowledge of which later gave him an advantage in his task of creating a definitive standard edition.

3.4.2. Challenges to 'Uthmān's Leadership

Although 'Uthmān was elected as caliph with a majority vote by a Muslim Shūra council of six men, he was conscious of the fact that his leadership could potentially be threatened by the popularity of 'Ali ibn Abū Ṭālib and, in an effort to win 'Ali's support, made him governor of Medina. The depth of the loyalty and support of the people of Medina was also unclear, as they suspected that 'Uthmān would be biased towards the Umayyad clan of the Qurayysh and that his administration would show favouritism towards his relatives.

Having assumed the position of caliph at an advanced age, 'Uthmān lacked 'Umar's strength and decisiveness[275], and was known instead for his leniency, deep personal religious devotion and traditionalism. 'Uthmān lacked knowledge about how to run the administration of the various frontiers that now came under Muslim control and never fully gained the respect or trust of the various governors who had operated under 'Umar, least of all that of 'Amr ibn al-'Ās, governor of Egypt. 'Uthmān therefore removed most of the governors from their positions and, to ensure that he would enjoy loyalty from then on, he replaced them with his own relatives and members of the Umayyad clan and granted them

[275] Lewis, B., 2002, p 59

greater powers than the governors had had under 'Umar. For example, while 'Umar had appointed Mu'āwiyah ibn Abū Sufyān as governor of Syria and Palestine, 'Uthmān extended his powers in the region and granted him full autonomy.

3.4.3. Military Campaigns and Consolidation of New Frontiers

'Uthmān's weakness and indecisiveness encouraged some Persian provinces, including Khurāsān and the neighbouring cities of Marw and Nishapūr, to rebel against their new governors and these rebellions were followed by similar unrest in the cities of Iraq. 'Uthmān appointed al-Walīd ibn'uqbah to head a large garrison of 40,000 men to be stationed in Kufa with the sole function of acting as a deterrent to any potential civil unrest or rebellion in Iraq and Khurāsān.

The lack of Muslim cohesion under 'Uthmān also gave the Byzantines the confidence not only to encourage revolt in Armenia and Azerbaijān, but also to regroup and attack Syria and Egypt simultaneously. In AD 645, under the command of Manuel, an Armenian general, Alexandria was retaken by the Byzantines (the size of their force is unknown), who massacred 200,000 Copts as punishment for their earlier collaboration with the Muslims[276]. The Muslim forces retreated from the city, and 'Uthmān replaced 'Amr ibn al-'Ās as governor of Egypt with 'Abdullāh ibn al-Surrah, who had little understanding of Egyptian affairs. When the situation in Egypt worsened, 'Uthmān sent reinforcements in the forms of 'Abdullāh ibn al-Zubayyr, 'Abdullāh ibn ''Umar and 'Amr ibn al-'Ās, the latter being reinstated as governor of Egypt at the request of the Egyptian Copts. After a long military campaign, 'Amr ibn al-'Ās managed to regain control of Alexandria in AD 656[277] (See map 25). Manuel was killed and the Byzantine forces were defeated, which once again would not have been possible without the assistance of the Egyptian Coptic Christians. The trust between 'Uthmān and 'Amr ibn al-'Ās was never restored and there is some suggestion that this sour relationship may have had something to do with 'Uthmān's eventual

[276] Zahoor, A., 2000, p 41
[277] Zahoor, A., 2000, p 38

assassination[278]. In the meantime, 'Abdullāh ibn al-Surrah was appointed to lead a Muslim force to meet the 120,000-strong Roman garrison in Tunisia.

In AD 648, Mu'āwiyah, who now had complete autonomy in the running of Syrian affairs, commissioned the first Arabian naval fleet to meet the Byzantine fleet guarding Cyprus, which had historically been used as a platform to invade the Syrian coast. Mu'āwiyah thought it better to make a pre-emptive attack on the fleet and take control of Cyprus rather than waiting for its navy to attack at any part of the extensive Syrian coast. Under the command of Abū Ayyūb Anṣārī the Muslim navy managed to defeat the Byzantine navy for the first time and gained control of Cyprus in AD 649 (See map 25). In AD 650, 'Uthmān appointed Sa'ad ibn abi Waqqās to the position of governor of Kufa and sent him to represent the Muslims to the Emperor of China. Sa'ad ibn abi Waqqās negotiated with the emperor and persuaded him to allow the Muslims to build China's first mosque at Ch'ang-an, later renamed Xian, which still stands today[279].

In AD 652, the Muslims managed to gain control of Dongola and Balkh, and 'Abdullāh ibn al-Surrah was sent to the Nubah and Sudan where he negotiated a peace and also an economic exchange treaty. In AD 653, the same year in which the revolt in Armenia was subdued, the Muslim navy reached the island of Rhodes[280]. Then, in AD 655, the Arabs defeated the Byzantine fleet off the coast of Lycia in a famous battle known as Dhu al-Ṣawārī, or Battle of the Masts, marking an end to the Byzantine navy's dominance of the eastern Mediterranean[281] (See map 25). This victory would never have been possible without local support from coastal Syria in the form of ship building and navigational expertise and manpower.

[278] Lewis, B., 2002, p 60
[279] Zahoor, A., 2000, p 43
[280] Zahoor, A., 2000, p 42
[281] Wintle, J., 2003, p 58

3.4.4. 'Uthmān's Death

As well as being criticised for his lack of authority, Caliph 'Uthmān was also condemned for the lack of modesty he displayed in his personal conduct. 'Uthmān was a wealthy individual who dressed well and lived well and was known for the exquisite gastronomy he enjoyed. Especially now that the Muslims were governing new frontiers, 'Uthmān was concerned that people might consider Islam a religion of the poor and destitute, so he encouraged his governors and all those who served under them to display an image of wealth and prosperity[282]. While 'Uthmān enraged people by giving full autonomy to Mu'āwiyah to run the Levant, he was also criticised for encouraging people to make complaints against his governors. Although he had done this in order to ensure that the governors were fulfilling the duties to which they had been assigned, his policy backfired on several occasions when people exaggerated incidents or invented lies against the governors they disliked and the governors were punished hastily and without an opportunity to respond to the complaints.

Many people were also incensed by the fact that 'Uthmān modified the zakāt to include horses and slaves, which the Prophet had specifically prohibited, and also by the exemptions to zakāt that he granted to his own family[283]. In fact, the constant claims of nepotism that 'Uthmān faced were perhaps the greatest source of the people's antagonism towards him. 'Uthmān's relative, al-Ḥārith ibn al-Hakim, who was put in charge of supervising the market places, abused his authority and, when 'Uthmān replaced the governors that 'Umar had appointed with his own friends and family, rebellions arose[284].

As a result of this state of discontent, a group of rioters and mutineers numbering approximately 2,000, travelled from Egypt, Basra and Kufa in AD 656 and descended upon Medina, besieging 'Uthmān's house. The rioters, who were led and agitated by two corrupt, opportunistic characters called Ibn Saba'and Mālik al-Ashtar[285], were united in their belief that 'Uthmān had to be replaced but they differed in their opinions about who should

[282] Rogerson, B., 2006, p 245
[283] Rogerson, B., 2006, p 253
[284] Rogerson, B., 2006, p 269
[285] Zahoor, A., 2000, p 43

replace him. Ibn Saba'and Mālik al-Ashtar firmly supported 'Ali, as did the Egyptians, while the rioters from Kufa believed that Ṭalḥah was the appropriate replacement, and those from Basra preferred al-Zubayyr. The Prophet's surviving companions and the people of Medina, on the other hand, refused to support any of these potential replacements, insisting that the Shūra council be properly consulted with the consent of 'Uthmān himself. Because it seemed, at first, that the protestors were intent on carrying out a non-violent demonstration, neither the caliph nor his associates made any attempt to engage a security force to defend him. However, the rioters, despite their lack of cohesion, managed to confine the 80-year-old 'Uthmān to his house for 22 days. While the demonstrators refused to disperse until 'Uthmān had discussed their demands, 'Uthmān, for his part, was unwilling to engage in discussions until the siege was broken. At the end of the 22 days, a small group of frustrated criminals broke into 'Uthmān's house and killed him and it is said that few people attended his funeral[286]. It must be pointed out that while many references suggest that 'Uthmān's death was the result of a civil war, it is more realistic to describe the events that took place as a riot that got out of hand with unfortunate results.

It is important to examine the fundamental role played by Ibn Saba'and Mālik al-Ashtar in the downfall of 'Uthmān and the subsequent rise of 'Ali to the position of caliph. Both men had his own reasons for wishing to fully exploit the divisions within Medina. Mālik al-Ashtar, a man from Kufa who presented himself as a hardliner and was not averse to using violence and intimidation, hoped that he would automatically be given a position as minister or advisor if 'Ali was nominated as caliph. Ibn Saba', for his part, was a shrewd and conniving individual who would twist ideology, religion and logic to further his own aims. Both are suspected of having Sassanian political connections[287]. Being from Yemen[288], he hated 'Uthmān as he believed that the man he had appointed to govern Yemen was unjust. Ibn Saba' therefore travelled to Basra, Kufa, Damascus and Egypt in an effort to rally support against 'Uthmān, calling for 'Ali to be appointed to the position of caliph. Ibn Saba'was the first man to suggest that 'Ali should have succeeded the Prophet and that the other three caliphs had usurped the caliphate against God's will[289]. He

[286] Zahoor, A., 2000, p 43
[287] Ahmed, H., 2006, p 113
[288] Zahoor, A., 2000, p 42
[289] Ahmed, H., 2006, p 19

reinforced the idea that the caliphate should descend from the Prophet's line, just as the crown had descended through the line of the Sassanian kings, a notion that was supported by the marriage of one of 'Ali's sons, al-Ḥasan, to one of the daughters of the last Sassanian emperor, Khusru. As one of the leaders of the rioters, Ibn Saba' was in a position to allow the criminal element of the mob to take 'Uthmān's life. With this aim achieved, he and Mālik al-Ashtar were able to begin their work of isolating 'Ali and sending him on a collision course with the Shūra council.

3.4.5. Achievements

Although 'Uthmān managed to consolidate the territories that the Muslims had reached under his predecessors, the accomplishment for which he is perhaps best remembered is the compilation of a definitive version of the Koran[290]. When the Prophet first received the revelations, they were written down in sections and memorised by some of his followers, many of whom had since died, either in battle or as a result of old age. 'Uthmān was concerned that the Koran was in danger of being corrupted, especially now that the Muslims controlled large frontiers whose populations were unable to speak or read Arabic, let alone correctly recite the Koran, and their accents and customisation of the written word might further alter the holy book's meaning. He was aware of the variations which had developed in different versions of the bible, which led to separate Christian factions, and wanted to avoid the same problem. He therefore decided to put together one authoritative version to be preserved for the future followers of Islam.

In AD 651, 'Uthmān set up a committee whose aim was to eliminate the discrepancies from the different versions of the Koran which were circulating throughout the Muslim provinces. This committee was headed by Zayd ibn Thābit, who Abū Bakr had commissioned to write the first official edition of the Koran, and also included 'Abdullāh ibn al-Zubayyr, Sa'id ibn al-'Āṣ and 'Abdullāh ibn Ḥarīth ibn Hishām. The committee collected all the existing versions of the Koran and compared them with that compiled by Zayd ibn Thābit under Abū Bakr, and the official text that resulted was then modified with

[290] Clark, M., 2003, p 22

diacritical marks to aid the reader in their recitation of the Koran as instructed by Prophet Muḥammad. This marks an evolutionary stage in the development of written Arabic[291].

Once the committee had compiled and completed the definitive edition, all other versions of the Koran were burned to eliminate any danger of further corruption or error and copies of the master version were sent to Mecca, Medina, Basra, Kufa, Damascus and Egypt. This compilation was to become 'Uthmān's greatest achievement and remains the official version of the Koran until today. Three of the original copies still exist and can be found in the Topkapi Museum in Istanbul, the National Museum of Uzbekhistān in Tāshkent and in the royal library of King Ḥasan of Morocco[292].

In addition to this achievement, 'Uthmān also ordered the extension of the area surrounding the Ka'ba (al-Haram), which, crowded with old houses and markets, was unfit to receive the large number of people who were now making the pilgrimage to Mecca from all of the Muslims' new frontiers. In AD 649, 'Uthmān also ordered the extension of Prophet Muḥammad's mosque in Medina, giving it a wooden roof held by carved stone pillars and altering it to incorporate six entrances. He introduced the idea of a Miḥrāb, a designated place within a mosque from where the Imām could lead the people in prayer[293].

3.5. 'Ali ibn Abū Ṭālib (AD 656 – AD 661)

3.5.1. Early Life

'Ali ibn Abū Ṭālib was born in around AD 598, one of the three sons of the Prophet's uncle Abū Ṭālib, who had looked after Mohammed when he was a boy. When Mecca fell on hard economic times, it was suggested to the Prophet that he should look after one of his cousins to lessen the economic burden on his uncle. Prophet Muhammed thereby assumed responsibility for 'Ali, whose brother Ja'far was looked after by the Prophet's uncle al-'Abbās, while the remaining son 'Aqīl stayed with his father. The Prophet treated 'Ali like his own son and it was perhaps for this reason that at the age of 13, 'Ali became the first

[291] Wintle, J., 2003, p 57
[292] Ahmed, H., 2006, pp 114, 115
[293] Zahoor, A., 2000, p 42

male to embrace Islam. Much of the Prophet's life was chronicled by 'Ali and much of Ḥadīth was related on his authority. 'Ali was known for his immense integrity – he was noted for his politeness and respect for his elders and he always kept his promises and honoured his financial agreements. It has been said that 'Ali was like a young 'Umar – straight, inflexible, uncompromising, highly idealistic and courageous. His outspokenness, eloquence and articulacy allowed him to lead people in prayer and deliver speeches to the masses. All of this, however, did make him vulnerable to other people's envy and also to his own idealism[294].

'Ali went on to become the Prophet's companion, confidante and military champion, and it is believed that the Prophet would often entrust him with the responsibilities of envoy and minister. During the period in which the Qurayysh was persecuting the Prophet and his companions, 'Ali protected the Prophet from assassination attempts by sleeping in his bed[295]. When the Prophet migrated to Medina, 'Ali married Muḥammad's 19-year-old daughter, Fāṭīma, who was Khadījah's daughter. Although this could be seen as giving 'Ali a considerable advantage, it was perhaps tarnished by his troubled relationship with the Prophet's wife, 'Ā'isha, who felt that her position was threatened by the union both because Fāṭīma had taken a pivotal role in looking after the Prophet and because she herself had not produced any heirs. 'Ali and 'Ā'isha's relationship is said to have been further soured by 'Ali's comments regarding an event in AD 627 which became known as the al-Iffk incident. It is reported that when 'Ā'isha joined the Prophet on one of his expeditions and was accidentally left behind by the caravan with which she had been travelling, a handsome young man from Mecca, Ṣaffwān al-Salamī, who had found her stranded and alone, returned her to her house in Medina on the back of his camel. The rumours that surfaced about the possibility that 'Ā'isha could have had an affair with Ṣaffwān upset the Prophet, prompting 'Ali to suggest that the Prophet look for another wife[296]. 'Ā'isha is said to have perceived this comment as a clear mark of disrespect from 'Ali, and she later took a fundamental role in raising opposition against him an action which may have also been inspired by the fact that 'Ā'isha was sister-in-law to al-Zubayyr, who was one of the people who had been suggested as a possible successor to 'Uthmān.

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[294] Rogerson, B., 2006, pp 34, 35
[295] Ahmed, H., 2006, p 125
[296] Rogerson, B., 2006, pp 99, 102

Despite this conflict within the family, 'Ali was still a trusted companion of the Prophet. He was a heroic, cavalier figure who, from an early age, had enjoyed a reputation as a fearless fighter who would never back down, and he therefore played an important role in all of the Muslim's major military confrontations, with the exception of Tabūk. As he was intelligent and highly educated, 'Ali was appointed as the scribe to write the document of the Treaty of Hudaybiyyah and, when the Prophet led the expedition to Tabūk, 'Ali was entrusted with the affairs of Medina[297]. He was also sent by the Prophet as an official envoy to Yemen during the Year of the Delegate. During Abū Bakr's caliphate, 'Ali was instrumental in organising the Hajj, and was also a member of the advisory council under Abū Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthmān[298].

Out of his marriage to Fāṭīma, 'Ali fathered two daughters, Zaynab and Umm Kulthūm, and two sons, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, which gave him a very respectable lineage, and those who believed that the caliph institution should remain in the Prophet's family thought that he would be an excellent choice for the position of caliph. When the Prophet died, it was 'Ali who covered his body, carried him to his grave and buried him and there were people who rallied behind 'Ali to succeed the Prophet as caliph[299] (See diagram 7). The Prophet's senior companions, however, saw the 33-year-old 'Ali as politically inexperienced and believed that a man of his youth would be unable to command the respect that would be required to guide the Muslim people through this testing time. Abū Bakr was therefore appointed over 'Ali to succeed the Prophet then, when Abū Bakr died, 'Ali was passed over for 'Umar, perhaps again on the basis of his youth and inexperience or possibly even as an indirect result of the antipathy between 'Ali and Abū Bakr's daughter 'Ā'isha. It was at this point that 'Ali married 'Umar's daughter, which could perhaps be seen as an attempt by 'Umar to keep 'Ali on his side.

When 'Umar subsequently died, people argued about the motives of his assassins. Many wondered if they were trying to exact revenge on 'Umar for the fall of the Sassanian Empire and some saw the assassination as a signal that the new converts from the Iraq province wished to pave the way for 'Ali to become caliph. The people of the former

[297] Rogerson, B., 2006, p 48
[298] Zahoor, A., 2000, pp 36, 41
[299] Rogerson, B., 2006, pp 58, 59

Sassanian Empire may have believed that 'Ali would be more sympathetic to their cause if they fully endorsed him, and those who wished to remain Muslim may have been more inclined to do so under a new dynasty from the Prophet's line. In the days between 'Umar's stabbing and his death, it is possible that he contemplated that nominating 'Ali under these conditions would make him vulnerable to manipulation by those who wished to hijack the caliphate for political purposes, and he may therefore have decided to nominate 'Uthmān instead, as he would be less susceptible to external political persuasion.

Although one might have expected 'Ali to resent the Shūra council and the Prophet's companions' belief that he would fail to command respect and loyalty, 'Ali never resisted being passed over. He accepted the conditions willingly and without bitterness, and never protested, perhaps feeling that it would be unwise to challenge the decisions of the Shūra council during those difficult times. Nevertheless, it must have been rather frustrating for a young man full of energy and a wish to make a mark on history to find himself constantly passed over, despite having apparently been groomed for leadership by the Prophet. Although 'Ali had been fully employed in matters of war and diplomacy under Prophet Muḥammad, the subsequent caliphs failed to offer him any more prestigious responsibilities than those pertaining to the local government of Medina. He was not given a governorship, nor the chance to lead any expeditions or armies, neither was he sent as a political envoy to any of the known states. These were perhaps unusual circumstances for a man who could have considered power and leadership to be the rights of someone of his lineage and early training.

3.5.2. Challenges to 'Ali's Leadership

When the protestors descended upon Medina in AD 656, it was generally understood that they simply wished to express their discontent, and the people therefore failed to anticipate that the riots may result in 'Uthmān's death. Indeed, it is probably true to say that the majority of the 2,000 rioters would themselves have wished to resolve the matter through dialogue with 'Uthmān. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that even the friends and family members who had benefited from 'Uthmān's caliphate failed to see the need to offer him any protection against the rioters. 'Ali, who was the governor of Medina would, like others,

have expected that the matter would be resolved through negotiation and he therefore chose not to risk encouraging a violent reaction by resorting to a show of force to disperse the protestors, which would have caused unnecessary bloodshed and serious repercussions throughout the provinces. Even Mu'āwiyah, the governor of Syria, who had gained considerably from 'Uthmān's caliphate, failed to see the necessity of offering him security against the demonstrators. Instead he watched the events unfold from a distance, hoping that if 'Uthmān decided to step down, he would nominate as his successor either Mu'āwiyah himself or someone with whom Mu'āwiyah would be prepared to work, which would not, of course, include 'Ali.

Upon 'Uthmān's death, the people of Medina decided that his successor had to be nominated immediately in order to calm the chaos that had arisen. The Shūra council was hastily convened and al-Zubayyr and Ṭalḥah, who had both been threatened at the point of Mālik al-Ashtar's sword, agreed not to nominate themselves, nor to object to the appointment of 'Ali[300]. Mālik al-Ashtar's attempts to intimidate the other senior Shūra council members were unsuccessful, however, as eight members of the council abstained from voting on the succession as they believed that making a hasty appointment was tantamount to ceding defeat to the rioters. 'Ali did not wish to accept the caliphate under these circumstances but, as well as being coerced by Mālik al-Ashtar, he also understood that immediate measures had to be taken to prevent civil disorder and he therefore accepted the position of fourth caliph of the Rāshīdūn period at the age of 57. 'Ali's priority was to alleviate the chaos and prevent the fragmentation of the Islamic state, and he therefore chose not to go after 'Uthmān's killers immediately, as he feared that they would take refuge in those provinces whose loyalty to the caliph institution he was struggling to maintain.

However, Mu'āwiyah had observed that the Prophet's family and closest companions resented the nature of 'Ali's election, which was not conducted according to the traditions established by the appointment of his predecessors. Mu'āwiyah had a number of reasons for wishing to exploit this rift. He knew that it would simply be a matter of time before 'Ali would have him replaced as governor of Syria. He believed that he had been effective in

[300] Ahmed, H., 2006, p 127

defending Islam's northern frontiers from the Byzantines and felt that replacing him would be unwise and would play into the hands of Islam's greatest enemy. When the bloodied shirt of the murdered 'Uthmān and the fingers of his wife were taken to the mosque of Damascus, fuelling opposition against 'Ali, Mu'āwiyah played the situation to his advantage. He made much of the fact that 'Ali had done nothing to assist 'Uthmān against the rioters, many of whom were his supporters, suggesting that 'Ali was indirectly responsible for 'Uthmān's assassination, and he eventually used that fact to assert his own authority and mount a challenge against 'Ali's leadership[301].

3.5.3. 'Ali's Challenges from his Opposition

When 'Ali accepted the role of caliph, he intended to run the Islamic state as his predecessors from Medina had run it. In an effort to silence his critics and rapidly assert his authority, he planned to appoint new provincial governors in the place of those that had been employed by 'Uthmān. Despite the senior Shūra council's advice to the contrary, he gave the order that the governors of Yemen, Basra, Kufa, the Levant and Egypt should vacate their positions. 'Ali succeeded in replacing the governor of Egypt with Qayṣ ibn Sa'd, the governor of Yemen with 'Ubayd ibn 'Abbās and, after lengthy negotiations, he managed to replace the governor of Basra with 'Uthmān ibn Hanīf. The latter was not able to win the total support of Basra's people as a large majority wished to see al-Zubayyr, rather than 'Ali, in the position of caliph. The other governors, namely Abū Mūsa al-Ash'ari of Kūfa and Mu'āwiyah of the Levant, refused to step down, arguing that they would forfeit their roles only when 'Ali had taken steps to avenge the death of 'Uthmān. Abū Mūsa would change his position and come to 'Ali's aid during a later incident. 'Ali decided that the only way he could assert his authority was by leading a military expedition of 20,000 men north to Damascus to remove Mu'āwiyah from office by force if necessary.

While 'Ali was preparing for this expedition, he received word that al-Zubayyr, Ṭalḥah and 'Ā'isha, accompanied by many of his opponents, had travelled from Mecca to Basra to seek assistance from al-Zubayyr's supporters. Upon his opponents' arrival in Basra, they managed to equip a large army, the aim of which was to descend upon Medina and strip

[301] Clark, M., 2003, p 21

'Ali of his powers. When he received word of this plot, 'Ali altered his plan to travel north to remove Mu'āwiyah from office, deciding that it was first necessary to meet this challenge to his leadership before it escalated. 'Ali sent envoys to Basra, instructing them to reason with his opponents and resolve the matter peacefully. He also requested support from Abū Mūsa of Kufa for these negotiations. At this point, Abū Mūsa rethinks his former opposition to 'Ali and decides to support him, believing that such an alliance would result in 'Ali retaining him as governor of Kufa. Abū Mūsa sent support in the form of a 9,000-strong army led by 'Ali's son al-Ḥasan and Mālik al-Ashtar.

'Ali's attempts at a peaceful resolution were almost successful but some within his camp felt that, if 'Ali agreed to capture 'Uthmān's killers to avoid a civil war, they themselves would be exposed as conspirators. In an effort to destabilise the peace negotiations, these conspirators, led by Ibn Saba' and Mālik al-Ashtar, indirectly influenced both 'Ali's camp and that being led by 'Ā'isha, Ṭalḥah and al-Zubayyr and discouraged peaceful negotiation, actively encouraging each side to continuously take arms against the other. They simultaneously attacked 'Ali's troops and those of his opposition, trying, with eventual success, to draw each side back into military conflict[302].

3.5.3.1. The Battle of al-Jamal (The Camel)

The two forces met in an area west of Basra in December AD 656 and a confrontation that became known as the Battle of al-Jamal ensued. Up to 10,000 deaths were reported as a result of this battle, although this figure can not be substantiated. Regardless of the accuracy of this figure, the casualties suffered at al-Jamal were on a greater scale than had been previously suffered in any battle, including the Riddah and the various confrontations with the Sassanian and Byzantine forces. Among the dead were Ṭalḥah and al-Zubayyr and many of the Prophet's family members and closest companions. 'Ā'isha's life was spared and she was allowed a dignified return to Medina and 'Ali was successful in consolidating Basra[303]. (See map 25)

[302] Lewis, B., 2002, p 61
[303] Lewis, B., 2002, p 61

3.5.3.2. Moving the Capital from Medina to Kufa

The Battle of al-Jamal was considered a prelude to the greater trials with which 'Ali was soon to be confronted. Once he had secured Basra, he marched north to Kufa where, partly thanks to the assistance of Abū Mūsa, he now enjoyed popular support. To avoid losing what he had gained in the Iraq province and the risk of being challenged in Medina by those who had suffered losses as a result of the Battle of al-Jamal, he decided to take the unprecedented move of taking the caliph institution away from Mecca and Medina and establishing it in Kufa[304] (See map 25). This marked the end of an era, as neither Mecca nor Medina has ever been the capital of an Islamic state since. In later times, the moving of Islamic capitals was to become an acceptable practice.

3.5.3.3. The Battle of Siffin, AD 657

'Ali decided that he had to neutralise Mu'āwiyah 's mutiny as soon as possible, so he called for his army and supporters to march towards Damascus, following the Tigris River north to Mosul, then travelling west towards the steppes of Siffin, where the Romans had built a great wall to separate their frontiers from the Persians'. When news of this expedition arrived in Damascus, Mu'āwiyah equipped a large army and rallied his supporters, who believed in his vision of a new kind of Islamic leadership, and marched northeast to meet 'Ali. After the two armies had met and engaged in brief skirmishes, they decided to avoid further loss of Muslim lives by settling the matter peacefully and 'Ali and Mu'āwiyah each sent delegates to negotiate with the other[305]. However, when Mu'āwiyah refused to comply with 'Ali's demand that he step down, and again accused 'Ali of conniving with 'Uthmān's killers and failing to avenge his death, the armies met once again and this time they fought relentlessly for three days and nights. The casualties from the confrontation were estimated at 70,000 men, although the large number of forces required to produce such casualties (especially given that al-Jamal must have reduced manpower to a great extent) would suggest that this figure may have been exaggerated in order to support the suggestion that

[304] Zahoor, A., 2000, p 43
[305] Lewis, B., 2002, pp 62, 63

this was a genuine, large-scale civil war[306]. When 'Ali's army managed to gain the upper hand and Mu'āwiyah was clearly on the defensive, 'Amr ibn al-'Ās, the former governor of Egypt who was fighting with Mu'āwiyah, suggested that they call for a truce to slow 'Ali's momentum. Mu'āwiyah's troops raised the Koran over their heads to call for arbitration according to the Book and 'Ali yielded to their call.

It was decided that 'Ali and Mu'āwiyah would each nominate an arbitrator and that each side would be obliged to adhere to the decisions that resulted from the arbitration. While Mu'āwiyah was represented by 'Amr ibn al-'Ās, 'Ali nominated Abū Mūsa al-Ashaari. They suggested that Mu'āwiyah should return with his army to Damascus, and 'Ali with his army to Kufa, and that from these cities they would share the running of the Islamic states until such a time as final arbitration could take place and a referendum could be held to choose a caliph. 'Ali's army, knowing that it had been in a good position to win the battle and put a definitive end to the conflict with Mu'āwiyah, was angry that 'Ali had agreed to this arrangement and, feeling that they had been subjected to a dishonourable defeat, they refused to return to Kufa. Mu'āwiyah and his army, on the other hand, returned to Damascus feeling that they had won a moral victory, as their power was still intact and they had succeeded in neutralising the threat from 'Ali's army[307].

The Muslims were thereafter divided into three groups - those who supported 'Ali (the Shī'ites), those who supported Mu'āwiyah, and a group of 'Ali's former supporters who felt cheated by the arbitration and subsequently opposed both 'Ali and Mu'āwiyah (the Khārijites, or Mutineers)[308]. When the time came for the final arbitration in 658, 'Ali sent Abū Mūsa al-Ashaari and Mu'āwiyah sent 'Amr ibn al-'Ās, each supported by 400 troops, to Domat al-Jandal. After a lengthy negotiation, 'Amr ibn al-'Ās led Abū Mūsa al-Ashaari to believe that he thought it best that neither 'Ali nor Mu'āwiyah should be caliph but that a third person should be nominated. When it became evident that 'Amr ibn al-'Ās had no

[306] Zahoor, A., 2000, p 43
[307] Ahmed, H., 2006, pp 132, 133
[308] Clark, M., 2003, p 22

intention of honouring his commitment but was simply manipulating Abū Mūsa al-Ashaari into agreeing to remove 'Ali from office, 'Ali began to feel that the whole arbitration process had been an elaborate deception. He was not in a position to launch an immediate military campaign against Mu'āwiyah, however, as he had lost cohesion and discipline within his own army and the Khārijites were gaining support and momentum in the Iraq province. He therefore recognised that he had to neutralise the threat from the Khārijites as a matter of urgency.

3.5.3.4. The Battle of Nahrawan

When it became evident that the Khārijites were unwilling to resolve the situation peacefully, either by joining 'Ali or by remaining neutral, 'Ali was forced to go into battle against them. Most of the 15,000 Khārijites who fought in the one-day battle in the old Persian city of Nahrawan in AD 659 were killed by the 70,000 men that 'Ali had mustered, with only a few managing to escape[309]. (See map 25)

3.5.3.5. Mu'āwiyah takes control of Egypt

While 'Ali was occupied with the fight against the Khārijites in Nahrawan, Mu'āwiyah was beginning to realise that he needed to develop political allegiances to assist in concluding his dispute with 'Ali. Seeing that Egypt could be a major source of supplies and rations to either 'Ali's army or his own, he decided that whoever gained the loyalty of the governor of Egypt, Qayṣ ibn Sa'd, would be in a considerably stronger position to win the civil war. If 'Ali succeeded in winning Qayṣ ibn Sa'd over to his side, Mu'āwiyah knew that he would have to fight a battle on two fronts and he therefore wrote to Qayṣ ibn Sa'd and sent delegates to Egypt to try to win his support. Mu'āwiyah's efforts, however, were futile. In an unexpected turn of events, Qayṣ ibn Sa'd resigned his post and left it to Muḥammad ibn Abu-Bakr, who had been appointed by 'Ali and was a weak and confused governor. Mu'āwiyah decided that the best course of action was to send 'Amr ibn al-'Ās, who had always wished to be reinstated as governor of Egypt, to march into Egypt with 6,000 men

[309] Ahmed, H., 2006, p 134

to remove its governor and take control[310]. When the news of the approaching army reached Muḥammad ibn Abu-Bakr, he requested support from 'Ali. As 'Ali was occupied with the fight against the Khārijites, however, he was not able to rush to Muḥammad ibn Abu-Bakr's aid. When he was finally in a position to send 2,000 men to Egypt, led by Mālik al-Ashtar, he received news of Muḥammad ibn Abu-Bakr's defeat and death. Mu'āwiyah managed to dispose of Mālik al-Ashtar by poisoning him then, having gained control of Egypt, he began a relentless series of skirmishes in the Iraq province, the aim of which was to confuse and weaken 'Ali's army[311]. He raided villages and cities, and was finally able to send an expedition of 3,000 men to Medina and Yemen to seek support. Subjected to this constant onslaught, 'Ali's troops were fragmented, confused and in a state of disarray. Having lost the support of Mecca, Medina and Yemen, 'Ali was isolated in Kufa and Mu'āwiyah had finally gained the upper hand.

3.5.4. 'Ali's Death

Against this backdrop of treachery, shifting alliances, war and death, 'Ali's position was severely compromised, and his support was dwindling. Mu'āwiyah was on the offensive, having taken firm control of the Levant, Mecca, Medina and Yemen, and his best friend 'Amr ibn al-'Ās had finally got what he had always wanted, namely, the control of Egypt.

A group of Khārijites decided, at this time, that the best way forward would be to assassinate the three leaders simultaneously then look for a single leader, who should not be from the tribe of the Qurayysh, who would unite the Muslims and take Islam into a new era without the fragmentation and egotism that had recently plagued them[312]. The Khārijites nominated a man called 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muljam to go to Kufa and wait for 'Ali to arrive on the nominated day to lead the people in morning prayer. On the seventeenth day of Ramaḍān, 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muljam stabbed 'Ali with a poison-tipped sword[313]. 'Ali survived for several days, during which time he refused to allow his murderer to be mutilated and advised his two sons to carry on in his role. 'Ali died on the nineteenth day of

[310] Zahoor, A., 2000, p 44
[311] Ahmed, H., 2006, p 135
[312] Clark, M., 2003, p 22
[313] Hitti, P.K., 2002, p 183

Ramaḍān, AD 661, and was buried in Najaf, outside Kufa. The attempts to assassinate Mu'āwiyah and 'Amr ibn al-'Ās were unsuccessful and their attempted murderers were apprehended and executed.

'Ali's death marked the end of the early Islamic period and the Rāshīdūn caliphate and a new chapter in Islamic history began when Mu'āwiyah consolidated his power over the Islamic state and established the first Islamic dynasty in the name of his family, the Umayyads.

3.5.5. Achievements

During the lifetime of the Prophet Muḥammad, 'Ali became his trusted confidante and the close personal bond between the two was clear. 'Ali's integrity and courage were widely recognised and, as a fearless fighter, he played a key role in many military confrontations. As a highly intelligent and educated man, he is responsible for major literary work, in the form of the Ḥadīth, and was responsible for the writing of the Treaty of Hudaybiyyah. Despite his obvious acumen and honour, the circumstances under which he accepted the caliphate, the politics of the time and the ambitions of those who held power around him paved the way for a troubled rule, dogged by political friction and attempted coups.

'Ali's reaction to the military opposition he was frequently presented with usually involved attempts to resolve matters peacefully. When an opposition army had gathered in Basra, he sent envoys under instruction to negotiate for peace. This wasn't successful and the bloody battle of al-Jamal ensued. Although 'Ali had failed diplomatically, he achieved success militarily. Again, at the battle of Siffin, after initial fighting, 'Ali sought negotiation and arbitration. He was not politically shrewd and so was more successful militarily than he was diplomatically.

A lasting effect of the caliphate of 'Ali is that, since he moved the capital from Medina to Kulfa, the moving of Islamic capitals became acceptable and neither Mecca nor Medina have since been the capital of an Islamic state. Mecca and Medina were not geographically

suitable for the governing of such a vast area. When 'Ali moved the administration to Kulfa, it precipitated something he never intended - the start of a new sect, the Shī'ites. This should be viewed positively, as Islam was in need of a new perspective, a new school of thought, one which benefited from the influences of that region immensely.

'Ali's caliphate marked the end of a tribal administration. Although he never really consolidated his power, his struggle to assert his authority paved the way for an Islamic empire. 'Ali was an important caliph in terms of how he set the stage for a new dimension of Islam.

Chapter Four: Islam – The Ongoing Legacy

Prior to the 6th century the Arab people, like the people of the rest of the known world, were mired in a culture of selfishness and individualism which granted rights and privileges only to members of the elite minority. Communities were violent, fragmented and lawless, people were hostile to one another and there existed no unifying force to encourage people to work together for the shared benefit of mankind. It was into this aggressive environment that Prophet Muḥammad brought Islamic teachings aimed at bringing about social reform and the fact that the people of Arabia had become unified, focused and idealistic by the end of Muḥammad's life is testament to both his determination and diplomacy, and to the strength of people's belief in the validity and significance of his ideas.

Although Islam has since evolved into different schools of thought and developed a more theological dimension, during the earliest inception of the faith its most significant contribution was the establishment of a detailed code of conduct according to which the people of the time could live and thereby build the foundations of a cohesive society. It is this early Islamic legacy that will be discussed herein.

4.1. Islamic Ideology or Creed

According to Islamic ideology, God, the sole creator of heaven and earth, was not himself the product of anyone else's creation or union, neither does he have any associates or descendents, nor resemble any part of his creation[314]. On the Earth that God created, Islam believes, there are two types of order, namely that of the divine and that of man, and while divine order is faultless and immutable, manmade order is inherently imperfect and is also a function of time, which means that it is incomplete and will eventually be rendered redundant. The Islamic faith teaches that all human beings are born with both inherent faith and the instinctive ability to know right from wrong, and it is only when reason comes into play that their faith is challenged and affirmed with knowledge[315]. Like other monotheistic religions that consider themselves as being representative of God's order on Earth,

[314] Armstrong, K., 2007, p 179
[315] Clark, M., 2003, p 42

therefore, Islam aims to save humanity from itself by teaching it how to submit to the perfection of the divine will of God, and it sees religion's role as one of civilising the human being and assisting him in his endeavours to judge himself and live by God's authority by providing him with moral and spiritual guidance. It also advocates that everyone is guided to that for which he was created[316].

In Islam's vision of existence, humanity lives in the physical world, while there also exists a supernatural world which we are able not to see but are able to sense or perceive[317]. The supernatural world, it is thought, exists outside of time, while in the physical world, time began when God created the universe. Certain people are thought to be gifted with the ability to sense the existence of the supernatural world more keenly than others and it is thought that that world may be revealed to mankind in a way and at a time of God's choosing[318].

The possible existence of the supernatural world is one of the fundamental points of contention between those who have faith and those who do not, as non-believers require physical, material evidence of the existence of facets of the paranormal such as God and angels, heaven and hell, resurrection and eternal life. Islam, however, insists that people be open-minded in their pursuit of knowledge as the key to understanding the physical and metaphysical worlds. Mankind exists on this physical world and his knowledge is limited by his earthly experience, but still he constantly seeks to find rational answers about the reasons for his existence. Islam insists that the only way to contemplate the supernatural world is by opening one's mind to other possibilities and it therefore actively encourages people to use their intelligence to feel God's existence through appreciation of his creation[319]. Islam is confident that through the argument, dialogue, debate and experimentation which are integral parts of the Islamic faith, man will always surmise that the universe exists as a result of God's divine order[320].

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[316] Clark, M., 2003, p 10
[317] Maqsood, R.W., 2006, p 45
[318] Armstrong, K., 2007, p 216
[319] Esposito, J.L., 1999, p 65
[320] Armstrong, K., 2007, p208

The Islamic faith sees itself as an extension of the Abrahamic, monotheistic tradition that runs through Judaism and Christianity, and which has also been seen in other monotheistic religions in different parts of the world[321]. Like these other traditions, Islam believes in the absolute oneness of God and in the immutable nature of God's attributes, including all names and descriptions of him, from whichever tradition they may have derived[322]. Islam also shares with the other monotheistic traditions a belief in Judgement Day and resurrection and in God's messengers and prophets and his Holy Books[323]. It believes that God's will can only be conveyed to mankind through deliverers who are sent to Earth at times when humanity has gone astray or is experiencing terrible hardship, and the fact that saviours arrive to lead people out of these testing times is seen as further proof of the existence of God. The Islamic faith calls for people to reinforce their belief with worship and action and posits that one must accept the will of God without bitterness[324].

Islam also advocates that man is judged continuously, both throughout his life and beyond his death and that, while he must repent for his sins, he does not require that an agent communicate with God on his behalf but rather he must rely on the judgement of his own conscience and appeal to God directly[325]. The Islamic faith believes that rather than disappearing forever when he dies, a man's life is simply passed on to the next generation and his existence continues to be appreciated through the legacy of his offspring and his good work and in the prayers that are offered up for him.

Islam considers itself a complete, logical and universal religion. It sees itself as being not only in harmony with nature but also capable of accommodating human needs in the changing face of time, place and circumstance. The message of Islam, rather than favouring certain races or colours, is seen as being inclusive of all mankind. It encourages people to know one another and to become brothers in faith and, because tolerance is one of the core facets of the religion, it is against slavery and injustice. The religion aims to be sensible, moderate and tolerant, and as it does not call for practices which are beyond human capacity or endurance, and it takes into account the variation in each individual's

[321] Armstrong, K., 2007, p 186
[322] Robinson, N., 1999, p 76
[323] Clark, M., 2003, p 52
[324] Esposito, J.L., 1999, pp 68, 71
[325] Clark, M., 2003, p 52

knowledge, experience and social status, people of all backgrounds are capable of complying with its tenets. Muslims are encouraged to build practically and systematically on other people's endeavours and experiences, which not only strengthens each individual's confidence in himself but also builds on man's respect for his fellow man.

4.2. The Five Pillars of Islam

Details of the Five Pillars of Islam can be found in many texts but perhaps their most important feature is the impact that they had on the first individuals and communities who attempted to live by them. This work aims to highlight the civilising influence of the Five Pillars of Islam, which shaped the early Islamic community and differentiated it from the civilisations that had come before it.

In order to consider oneself a Muslim, one must comply with each of the Five Pillars of Islam which, being the very foundation of the faith, are non-negotiable, although how one complies is seen to be a matter of personal conscience and endeavour. As no one is granted the authority to check on whether or not people are complying with the tenets, each individual is left to determine, according to the guidance of his or her own conscience, whether and precisely how he or she will fulfil the requirements of each of the tenets. Especially during early Islamic times, this granted people a sense of autonomy and personal responsibility as, rather than living according to the threat of imminent punishment for any possible wrongdoing, they sought to strive for personal improvement by judging themselves against the expectations of their religion.

While the concept of jihad is not considered one of the Five Pillars of Islam, it is, nevertheless, thought to be very important. As some Islamic religious scholars unofficially consider jihad the Sixth Pillar of the faith, it is therefore appropriate to discuss it here.

4.2.1. The Article of Faith - Shahada

The Article of Faith states that there is no god but God and that Mohammad is God's messenger. By stating this oath, Muslims pledge their loyalty and allegiance to the

Almighty and his messengers and accept the Koran as the very word of God. The Article of Faith confirms a Muslim's understanding of the responsibility of being a Muslim and reminds him of the focus of his commitment, devotion and worship. This could be considered the foundation of the other Pillars of the Faith as, without an absolute belief in God, in Mohammad as his messenger and in the Koran as his word, one cannot profess to believe in the other components of the faith[326].

The early Muslims came to understand that in order to fulfil the precept that they always choose good action over wrongdoing, they had to be focused, pure and contemplative in their intention and discrete in their action. By accepting the fundamental notion that there must be no discrepancy between heart, mind and deed, the people of the time began to comprehend the importance of living truly and reasonably, and without confusion or hypocrisy. Because Islam insisted that one had to be a free, conscious, clear-thinking and consenting adult in order to commit to the faith, anything that might have diminished the people's ability to reason, such as mental instability or the influence of mind-altering substances, was prohibited.

An inevitable outcome of each individual's attempts to live seriously, responsibly and truthfully, was that the community as a whole became more cohesive. People were bound together by their shared determination to conduct themselves honourably and, as communities thereby came to be at peace, the people within them began to speak with one voice, knowing that their lives were worthwhile and that they would each be prepared to give their lives for what they collectively believed in.

4.2.2. Pray Five Times a Day Towards Mecca

In pre-Islamic Arabia, people had no particular sense of time or responsibility, and developing the discipline of praying five times a day towards Mecca therefore had a tremendous impact upon the people and the way they managed their everyday lives. The five prayers, which take place at set times to acknowledge the five phases of the day, not only remind people of the wonder of God's universe but also give communities a sense of

[326] Hitti, P.K., 2002, pp 128, 130

time. Morning prayer takes place when light first breaks, noon prayer when the sun is vertical, afternoon prayer when the sun is pointing west, sunset prayer when the sun disappears and evening prayer when there is no longer any light on the horizon[327]. To fulfil the obligations of this Pillar of Islam, early Muslims were required to think and educate themselves about the concepts and cycles of time. Because this tenet of the faith requires that people pray towards Mecca, early Muslims also began to seek knowledge about geography and navigation, as working out the direction of Mecca sometimes presented a complicated scientific challenge[328].

Another civilising aspect of the five daily prayers stems from the knowledge that, when praying, one is in the presence of God and must, therefore, be suitably presentable in appearance and behaviour. Before going to prayer, Muslims cleansed themselves by washing their faces, hands, arms and feet with clean water in a purification act which prepared them for worship and which was, in itself, an integral part of the act of prayer. The people learned that cleanliness and purity were signs of respect and that anything that might diminish that purity, such as menstruation, urination, drunkenness or the breaking of wind was disrespectful to the act of worship and therefore inappropriate during times of pray[329]. The introduction of this concept encouraged hygiene and respect in a time when these ideas had been relatively unheeded.

Perhaps the most significant effect of the introduction of the five daily prayers was in the sense of solidarity, assurance and protection that was afforded to the people when they began to pray together on such a regular basis. Praying with family or going to a mosque was found to break down anti-social behaviour as people of all ages, colours and ethnic groups learned to respond to the human voice calling them to prayer and to stand shoulder to shoulder in their shared worship of God. This collective undertaking reinforced people's sense of duty toward one another and the very act of gathering led to other forms of communication such as discussion and trade[330].

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[327] Robinson, N., 1999, p 98
[328] Hitti, P.K., 2002, pp 131, 132
[329] Robinson, N., 1999, p 99
[330] Robinson, N., 1999, pp 101, 107

4.2.3. Fast During Ramaḍān

During the month of Ramaḍān, the ninth month of the lunar calendar, Muslims abstain from food, drink and sexual acts from sunrise until sunset. There are many ways in which this fasting could be considered to have had a civilising effect on the early Muslims, perhaps the most significant being that, through abstinence, people were forced to appreciate life's gifts where they had previously taken them for granted. Because everybody, whether rich or poor, young or old, shared the inconvenience of fasting and the family was brought together when the fast was broken, Ramaḍān united the community and prepared it for the possibility of famine and catastrophe. During Ramaḍān, people were encouraged to carry out charitable acts, and were similarly discouraged from antisocial behaviour, profanity and obscenities[331].

As the month of Ramaḍān follows the lunar calendar, people are required to watch, observe and calculate to determine when the month should begin and end. This act in itself prompts people to see God through the wonder of his creation and it provided a catalyst for early Muslims to educate themselves in detailed aspects of astronomy and mathematics. Because the month of Ramaḍān is determined by a lunar calendar, it rotates around the solar cycle every 24 years, and its days are therefore sometimes short and the fast comparatively easy, while in other years the days might be long and the fast commensurately more challenging. Whichever way, fasting requires that the individual resists temptation, which strengthens his or her ability to restrain himself or herself from what is natural and is, in itself, considered an act of worship[332].

4.2.4. Zakāt – Paying Alms

The concept of zakāt, or the paying of alms, is the Islamic way of financing the economy using a method which is sensible and responsible and takes into account the interests of the community. The early Muslims to whom zakāt was introduced were taught to express their gratitude for their own good fortune by giving something back to the community. So where

[331] Robinson, N., 1999, p 124
[332] Robinson, N., 1999, p 118

the act of cleansing before prayer was a physical act of purification, the giving of alms was seen as a charitable act of purification of possessions and was, therefore, another form of worship[333].

Zakāt was paid once in every Islamic calendar year in the manner deemed appropriate by the individual and, although it could be given to a community leader to spend as he considered suitable, it was also acceptable for the individual to pass the money or possessions directly to the poor. Each individual had the choice of either paying a fixed percentage of the value of his or her surplus material possessions, such as money, jewellery, livestock and agricultural produce, or of giving away the actual surplus goods themselves. For humanitarian reasons, slaves were not considered material possessions under the rules governing zakāt, neither were horses, which were considered a necessity for defence. Because zakāt was compulsory but not enforceable, people were allowed to use their own conscience and discretion to decide on their own priorities, which built a sense of trust within the early Islamic community. As the Islamic calendar follows a lunar cycle, the giving of zakāt takes place at different times every year and allowance is made for the fact that an individual may have more or less to give from one year to the next, depending on the season and the prevalent conditions of the time[334].

4.2.5. Hajj - The Pilgrimage to Mecca

When the early Muslims were introduced to the concept of Hajj, in which able-bodied adults made a pilgrimage once in their lifetime to Mecca, they found themselves undertaking an act of total submission, as the Hajj represented an enactment of the day of judgement. By retracing the steps taken by prophets and visiting the Ka'ba, the house of God, one was thought to be surrendering to the call, and stating, "I have testified that there is one God, I have prayed, I have fasted and I have given alms. Now, by terminating my journey in life with this pilgrimage, I am fulfilling my oath."[335]

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[333] Hitti, P.K., 2002, p 132
[334] Robinson, N., 1999, pp 112, 115
[335] Hitti, P.K., 2002, p 134

As well as the positive effect that the Hajj had on the individual, it also built a bigger and more cohesive Islamic community. Two months after Ramaḍān, at the end of the Islamic calendar year, people of different races, ages and colours gathered from all over the world to converge on Mecca for a one-day event in which they all met on Mount Arafat and spoke and exchanged ideas with new people[336]. Mount Arafat became a focal point for people from all nations who had travelled and endured hardship together and, therefore, became inextricably linked with one another, which inevitably benefited the Islamic community as a whole[337]. Because the timing of the Hajj, like that of fasting and the giving of alms, was dictated by the lunar calendar and therefore rotated in a 24-year cycle, Hajj was made more or less difficult by the time of the year in which it was carried out.

4.2.6. Jihad

Although it is not officially one of the Five Pillars of Islam, jihad is a religious duty for all emancipated, consenting adults. Widely misunderstood to mean "holy war", jihad actually means "struggle", and any act which works for the good of Islam, including study and meditation, preaching, missionary work and good deeds all constitute acts of jihad. In recent years, the concept of jihad has been politicised and people have attempted to find a link between jihad and terrorism when, in fact, no such link exists. While fighting for the Islamic faith is indeed one element of jihad, this fight can take place on an intellectual level and any military aspect of jihad limits itself to acts of self-defence, so the concept cannot be used as an excuse for military expansionism or conquest or the conversion of people by force[338]. The fact that jihad has been associated with acts of terrorism, such as suicide bombing and kidnapping, demonstrates an absolute misinterpretation of the concept, which actually calls for the resistance of all forms of evil, whether manifested through thought, word or action[339].

Like other forms of worship within the Islamic faith, jihad requires absolute clarity of intention and one cannot contemplate the concept if one's intentions are confused or

[336] Armstrong, K., 2007, p 187
[337] Robinson, N., 1999, p 141
[338] Sultan, S., 2004, pp 252, 274-280
[339] Esposito, J.L., 2002, pp 117, 122, 127

obscured. The list of acts which constitute adherence to the concept of jihad is limitless but examples might include refraining from wrongdoing, endeavouring to do one's best in any given situation, assisting others in their battles against injustice, solving problems through negotiation and mediation, enduring hardship and caring for one's children despite the personal sacrifice that might be required to do so.

4.3. The Sources of Teaching and Legislation

During the late Umayyad and Abbasid eras, religious scholars developed new schools of thought which extended the discussion of the details of the Islamic faith. In the 7th century, however, the three major sources of teaching and legislation in the Islamic faith were, in order of importance, the Koran, the Sunnah and the decisions of the Shūra council. The reader should be reminded that any developments that took place after this early Islamic period are considered beyond the scope of this work[340].

4.3.1. The Koran

Muslims believe that the Koran is the very word of God and that it was revealed in Arabic in the same way that the Ten Commandments were revealed to Moses[341]. The unique style in which the Koran is written, which is neither poetry nor prose but uses simple language to very powerful effect, is considered miraculous proof of the text's divinity. While the Arabs to whom it was revealed prided themselves on their command of language, which allowed them to be poetic, outspoken and eloquent, even the members of the Qurayysh challenged by Muḥammad to produce a similar verse of their own found themselves incapable of mimicking the language convincingly enough to do so[342].

The Koran was revealed to Prophet Muḥammad in different parts, chapters and verses over a period of 23 years, one of the reasons for this gradual revelation being that it allowed the people to adapt slowly to the emergence of the faith and to contemplate, understand and absorb its message, rather than having to make radical and abrupt changes to their

[340] Robinson, N., 1999, p 149
[341] Clark, M., 2003, p 2
[342] Robinson, N., 1999, p 59

lifestyles. It also simplified the task of understanding, memorising and recording the text, an undertaking which Muḥammad assigned only to his most trusted companions. Perhaps most importantly, the progressive nature of the revelations gave Prophet Muḥammad constant reassurance that his prayers for divine guidance were being answered, as each chapter and verse correlated with the challenges being faced by Muḥammad at the time of its revelation. For example, when the Prophet was challenging the Qurayysh about the concept of monotheism and the tribe's use of false idols, the verse that was revealed assisted him with his dialogue on the subject. Also, when he went to Medina, the revelations involved the rights of women, slaves and non-Muslims, which were issues that arose when the Islamic community was first being established[343].

As well as linking historical facts and helping the people of the time to understand their place within an ancient biblical tradition, the Koran challenged all previously accepted concepts and ideologies and provided proof of its assertions. Although the Koran was compiled and committed to text around the middle of the 7th century, it contained new ideas and knowledge that would have taken years to accumulate and which remain scientifically undisputed to this day. It discusses such things as the origin of the universe, the evolutionary process in the birth of man, the fact that the earth is round, cosmic order and the role of the sun and moon and their effects on the creatures of the earth. It also prophesies the end of nations and the eventual fate of peoples[344].

4.3.2. Sunnah - The Way of the Prophet

Prophet Muḥammad's precision and eloquence and the wisdom and consistency of the things he said allowed him to establish himself as a role model for the early Islamic community and his actions, sayings and customs are presented as running parallel with the teachings of the Koran. The Sunnah, or Way of the Prophet, which was detailed in the Ḥadīth and could take the form of speech, instruction, warning, caution or question and answer, was memorised and recorded by the Prophet's family and companions[345].

[343] Clark, M., 2003, p 108
[344] Ayoub, M.M., 2004, p 111
[345] Armstrong, K., 2007, p 192

Those companions and the religious scholars who followed them were aware that the holy books of other religions had been corrupted by the reinterpretations to which they had been subjected since their original revelation. Because of the tremendous importance of the Sunnah, which is second only to the Koran in its legislative order, they followed a strict method of authentication called Isnad to prevent the Ḥadīth from being corrupted or misinterpreted. Those Ḥadīth which are almost certainly true are considered "sound", those which are possibly true are considered "good" and those that cannot be thought true unless confirmed by other traditions are considered "weak"[346]. The Prophet himself was conscious that people might attempt to compile the Sunnah into a holy book and insisted that it did not in itself constitute an independent work of literature. Instead, the Sunnah, which takes the form of short, individual messages, should be read in parallel with the Koran, as together they provide motivation for Muslims to live in accordance with Islamic values and codes.

The actual content of the Ḥadīth, known as matn, may be about something the Prophet did, something he said, something that happened in his presence or something he explained, whether it be an issue arising from the Koran or an element of human experience that the Koran did not discuss. The messages clarified issues about a wide spectrum of human actions which, according to Shari'ah law, fit into one of five categories. While the first category, wajib, or obligatory actions, are beyond debate, the remaining categories of action are more open to discussion and interpretation, the only absolute rule being that the interests of the community must always have priority over the interests of the individual. The first of these groups of actions is mustahabb, or recommended actions, such as voluntary charity. The next group is mubah, or natural actions, which are not addressed by the Koran as they have no moral or legal consequences, and they include such things as diet and style of dress. The third category is makruh, or discouraged actions, such as divorce. The fourth is haram or forbidden actions, such as homosexuality, which are strongly discouraged. Any act which falls into the category haram would only be punishable if it

[346] Robinson, N., 1999, p 88

breaks a civil law. In private, the individual is expected to use his own discretion in the full knowledge that committing such an act will carry consequences beyond this life[347].

4.3.3. Decisions of the Shūra Council

In the last years of his life, Prophet Muḥammad knew that there would come a time when the Muslim people would have to learn to make decisions without his guidance. As he wished to ensure that his companions would be capable of leading the Muslim people after his death, he encouraged them to become independent thinkers and to work together to use legislative tools to make decisions that were in line with the Koran and Sunnah. During the Prophet's life and in the immediate aftermath of his death, therefore, there was no sense of discontinuity, as it was trusted that the Shūra council, made up of people who understood the Koran and the Prophet's way, would carry out Islamic principles and teachings as though the Prophet were still guiding them[348]. For example, the Shūra council was directly responsible for the election of the first, second and third caliphs and indirectly for the election of the fourth, and it gave powers to the appointed governors of different provinces to deal with civil and religious matters, with strict instructions to comply with the Prophet's teachings. It also had the authority to oversee the progress of law enforcement and to ensure that justice was served to all people, regardless of race, colour or religion.

The Shūra council had in its possession the apparatus of legislation required to rule on all the issues that might have come before it. The first of these was the application of Shari'ah law itself, which was derived from the Koran and Sunnah but was interpreted and expanded to deal with new situations. Unlike modern Western law, there is no separation under Shari'ah law between religious, civil and criminal law and it prescribes behaviour for all aspects of life. The legislation is applied using the consensus of legal scholars, known as ijma, or analogy, measure or precedent, known as qiyas, neither of which can be applied to religious rituals but both of which can be used in social and legal circumstances[349].

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[347] Brown, D., 2004, p 117
[348] Brown, D., 2004, pp 118, 122
[349] Lindsay, J.E., 2005, p 24

The second apparatus used by the Shūra council were traditional cutoms or Urf. In the early Islamic period, there were established traditions and practices which formed the character of any given culture but which were not discussed either in the Koran or by the Prophet. The fact that certain practices were not alluded to did not mean that they were necessarily right or wrong, but rather that they were matters about which the people could make their own decisions. Music, food, fashion, celebration and wedding ceremonies were among the things that the Prophet left to the discretion of the people. As long as traditions did not contradict the Koran or Sunnah or work against the welfare of the masses, they were allowed to stay in place, and the Shūra council could use them as a basis for further decision-making. This was also true of pre-Islamic virtues from within and without the Arab world, regardless of origins. Anything good, whether originally Arab, Greek, Roman, or Persian, could be subsumed into the Islamic faith and become part of the Islamic tradition, which is how the honour, courage, loyalty, hospitality and steadfastness of pre-Islamic Arabs and the humility and purity of the Christian monks came to be considered Islamic virtues[350].

Muslims are cautious when using analogical reason to decide upon appropriate penalties under Shari'ah law, and they therefore use a number of other tools to fine-tune the ijmah and qiyas to allow greater flexibility within Islamic law. The first of these tools is istihisan, the aim of which is to promote the common good. When there are two possible ways of making a ruling, people are encouraged to seek the good and exercise judicial preference. The second tool is istilah, or seeking what is correct, which promotes public and private welfare. The third tool, istishad, regards the necessity of providing evidence, albeit circumstantial. For example, when discussing inheritance law, it is presumed that a person is alive until the time of his normal lifespan has elapsed, after which time is it considered lawful to presume him dead. The fourth tool, urf, regards things that took place during the time of the Prophet but which he did not comment upon, and could be used to legislate on the customs and traditions of a community[351].

[350] Clark, M., 2003, p 128
[351] Clark, M., 2003, p 130

The fifth tool is darura, or necessity, which must always consider the community's interests first, and then those of the individual. An example of the application of this tool was when Caliph 'Umar, as mentioned above, recognised that people were having to steal to feed their families during a period of famine and repealed the law that stated that people found guilty of stealing would have their hands cut off. The sixth tool is ibaha, or permissibility, which allowed the Shūra council to make rulings on individual cases to give people permission within the law. For example, while a man had the automatic right to divorce his wife but a woman required the ruling of a judge to be allowed to divorce her husband, the Shūra council could rule that the woman's marriage contract could be rendered void by a decision taken by the woman herself, with the consent of the husband.

4.4. Islamic Ethics, Etiquette and Behaviour

Before the inception of Islam in the 7th century, the Near East was in desperate need of radical social and behavioural reform. It is for this reason that the early Muslims were willing to adapt their lifestyles to conform to the definitive code of conduct that was offered by Prophet Muḥammad, who made it evident that anyone who was unwilling to modify their behaviour to conform to the rules of Islamic etiquette would be unable to fit into the new social order. By following the example set by the Prophet himself, the people slowly learned to take greater responsibility for the things they said and did, as well as becoming more conscious of their own personal conduct and interpersonal dealings.

In considerable contrast to the social norms that had dominated the culture prior to the introduction of the new Islamic etiquette, the early Muslims were taught that every action had moral significance, and that clarity of intention was an important element of living according to the faith. Sincerity, consistency and straightforwardness were of paramount importance, as were wisdom, modesty, faith, work, charity, courtesy, generosity, trustworthiness and moderation, all of which were seen as forms of worship. Moreover, Prophet Muḥammad taught the early Muslims that they must always be kind to and

respectful of their parents, family, neighbours, the sick and the dead, all of whom it was one's responsibility to take care of[352].

An important aspect of early Islamic etiquette involved the polite and respectful way of addressing God, his messengers and his Holy Books, none of which should ever be insulted or dishonoured through mishandling or discourteousness. It was taught that resentment of any aspect of God's creation was tantamount to resentment of God himself, and that failure to accept any aspect of his creation was blasphemous. For example, an insult aimed at the sun or the wind was considered an insult to God's creation and, through it, God himself.

While praising and encouraging good and positive acts, Prophet Muḥammad actively discouraged behaviour which he saw as uncivilised and therefore un-Islamic. He argued that, by failing to avoid exaggeration, extremism and any avenues that might lead to lust, greed or anger, people would be living fundamentally bad lives. The rules of Islamic etiquette therefore outlawed lewd acts, profanity, vulgarity, exhibitionism, voyeurism and antisocial behaviour. Raising your voice and letting your eyes prey on members of the opposite sex came to be considered bad manners. Nakedness became a taboo as, while it was believed that God created man in his image in the sense that he was a perfect creature worthy of respect, what made a man civilised was his sense of modesty. For that reason, Prophet Muḥammad encouraged men to cover themselves at least from the waist to the knee when in public, and suggested that women cover everything but their faces and hands. The Prophet also taught the early Muslims that they had to act responsibly in relation to art. Depictions of the human form which could lead to idolatry, along with those which presented the naked body in a sexually provocatively way, were to be discouraged. Images of the human form were permissible, however, when used for illustration and decoration. The same moral conduct was expected with regard to poetry and writing, which had to be free from insult, blasphemy and overtly sexual content[353].

[352] Clark, M., 2003, p 182
[353] Clark, M., 2003, p 185

4.5. Islamic Social Order

While the rulers of Pre-Islamic Arabia had granted rights and privileges only to the elite minority, Prophet Muḥammad introduced a new social order in which fundamental rights were preserved for all, regardless of religion, background, gender or social status. These included the right to live and defend oneself, the right to protect one's possessions and community, the right to be physically and mentally free and the right to not be discriminated against.

4.5.1. Rights of Women

Women were among the first to be emancipated under the new Islamic social order, and they played a pivotal role in the establishment of the Islamic community. A number of women were instrumental in relating Ḥadīth and became authorities on the Koran, having memorised and learned how to recite it. As a result of the introduction of Islamic law, women in the 7th century were allowed to seek an education, inherit property or run their own businesses and they also had the right to fight for and defend their faith on the battlefield. A woman was allowed to choose her own husband and keep her own name in marriage and, although her husband had no entitlement to the money and possessions that she owned independently, the woman had the automatic right to alimony if her husband divorced her. Unless she was proven incapable of raising her children, the woman would be granted custody in the event of a divorce or she could exercise her right to delegate the responsibility for their upbringing to her mother or sister rather than to her husband. A woman had the right to protest against ill treatment and could divorce her husband if she so chose, although she would have to act through a mediator[354].

While recognising the rights of a woman, early Islam also believed that the physical and emotional characteristics of women had to be taken into consideration. While Islam accepted one man as a witness, it suggested that the emotional nature of women demanded that just one woman's word was insufficient but two women together were adequate to bare

[354] Maqsood, R.W., 2006, p 137

witness[355]. Women who were menstruating were not expected to pray, go to the mosque, fast or do Hajj, and any divorce that took place while the wife was menstruating would be considered void. If a man divorced a woman while she was pregnant, the divorce would not come into force until the child had been delivered.

4.5.2. Family Relationships

As Shari'ah law was always applied to everyday life as well as to religious practices, the early Muslims also became subject to guidance regarding issues of sex and family[356]. It must be pointed out that many of the laws, such as that which permitted men to take up to four wives, were written in response to the social conditions that existed during the early Islamic period. In 7th century Arabia, the rate of mortality among men was considerably higher than that among women, which resulted in a high percentage of unmarried women in the population. Not wishing to condone such practices as extramarital affairs or prostitution, Islam allowed multiple marriages as a way of ensuring not only that as many women as possible were able to find a husband but also that those women would be cared for within their marriage. While Islam made multiple marriages a theoretical possibility, it also established extremely strict criteria for men wishing to take a second, third or fourth wife, criteria that very few men were ultimately able to meet[357]. Before taking on another wife a man had to prove, not only that he was able to afford to provide adequately for more than one wife, but also that there was no hostility between any of the women he would marry. Each of the wives had to be considered equal and none could be harmed or detrimentally affected by the marriage and, if a wife would not consent to her husband taking another wife, she had the right to divorce him[358].

Under early Islamic law, sex was seen as a healthy celebration of life and something for which individuals should take personal responsibility, especially with regards to the spread of diseases and the conception of children. Islam encouraged marriage and required that the marriage contract be witnessed and recorded to ensure people's rights. Homosexuality was

[355] Maqsood, R.W., 2006, p 141
[356] Lindsay, J.E., 2005, p 178
[357] Clark, M., 2003, pp 187, 189
[358] Esposito, J.L., 2002, pp 102, 144

forbidden, although Islam recognised that there were people who had a sexual malfunction or whose sexual orientation was confused, and it encouraged these people to seek support and refrain from publicly exhibiting or discussing their particular sexual proclivity. Although there was no punishment for sexual deviance itself, actual acts of sexual deviance were punishable at the discretion of the caliph and community leaders were sometimes forced to send people away for the safety and wellbeing of the rest of the community[359].

4.5.3. Rights of Children

Just as the rights of women were enshrined by Shari'ah law, so for the first time were the rights of children, who became entitled to care, protection, nourishment, accommodation and inheritance. Once proof of parentage had been established, a child's maintenance became the responsibility of the father and his family, that responsibility only falling to the mother if the father and his family were deceased or unable to provide for the child. Community leaders became accountable for the care of orphans, who would either be housed in orphanages or assigned to families who were in a position to provide for them. Surrogacy and adoption were illegal, as the conception of a child had to take place within the institution of marriage to prevent complex questions of parenthood and parental responsibility from arising, although it was considered charitable for families and communities to raise o parentless children as their own in order to ensure their protection and welfare[360].

4.5.4. Rights of Slaves

Another group of people who benefited from the inception of Islam were those who had previously been confined to a life of slavery. In a time when slavery was not only a fundamental reality but the very foundation upon which the economies of empires had been built, it was impossible to abolish the practice outright but early Muslims took drastic steps which resulted in its gradual decline and eventual end. Under Islam, slaves were granted the right to fair treatment and were encouraged to appeal to community leaders in the event of

[359] Esposito, J.L., 2002, p 146
[360] Clark, M., 2003, pp 190, 191

maltreatment. It was forbidden to take prisoners of war as slaves, unless the opposition were taking their prisoners as slaves, but the ransoming of prisoners of war was still permissible. They were also exempted from paying alms and from fighting in wars and slaves could not be pressed into serving on a master's behalf. They were given the right to buy their own freedom or to marry free people and thereby become liberated themselves. Islam actively encouraged the freeing of slaves as either an act of humanity or as an act of contrition. For this reason, Islam was perceived as a revolutionary force which ran counter to the interests of the elite, while at the same time being recognised as an attractive, empowering force by slaves and the destitute, who became the religion's most fervent supporters[361].

4.5.5. Rights of Non-Muslims

Other people whose rights were enshrined in law by the early Muslims were those of different religious faiths and denominations. Because Islam considered itself an extension of the other monotheistic, Abrahamic traditions, it perceived Jews and Christians as People of the Book whose rights and autonomy had to be respected and preserved. Even in the earliest days of Islam, therefore, non-Muslims were granted the freedom not only to practice their own faiths, but also to choose whether they wished to govern themselves according to their own rules or to live under Islamic jurisdiction. Non-Muslims were exempted from participation in jihad and Muslim military expeditions, although they were expected never to come to the aid of the enemies of Islam or to side against Muslims in battle. The early Muslims defended the right of non-Muslims to have their own places of worship, and there is no evidence of any ethnic cleansing, genocide or the collective punishment of non-Muslim civilians ever having taken place under Islamic rule[362].

Although people of other faiths were not required to pay zakāt, they did pay a civil tax known as jiziyah, in return for which they were granted access to civil services such as healthcare and education, as well as being promised the protection of the state. Those who were too poor to pay jiziyah could be exempted at the discretion of community leaders and

[361] Esposito, J.L., 2002, p 147
[362] Clark, M., 2003, p 269

jiziyah was paid not by travellers but only by citizens of Muslim nations, who were entitled to elect their own community leaders and also to have a say in the decisions made by Muslim leaders. As jiziyah was considered a contract, it was payable only when the Muslims were able offer that for which they were accepting payment. For example, when Khālid ibn al-Walīd entered Hems, he returned the money that had been paid by non-Muslims in the form of jiziyah because he was not sure that he would be able to protect the people against the rapidly expanding Byzantine army.

4.5.6. Civil Law versus Shari'ah Law

Having firmly established the civil rights of the people, the early Muslims had also to institute a system under which those who violated the civil liberties of others would be punished. As there was no separation in Islam between religion and state, every aspect of daily life became subject to Shari'ah law, which was seen as an extension of the Ten Commandments and therefore as the application of God's law on earth. According to Shari'ah law, crimes against God were the most heinous and, therefore, the denial of the existence of God and his associates was believed to be a sin for which the perpetrator could only be punished by God himself. Sins against life and family, such as murder, theft and rape, were considered the next worst crimes, and acts of wrongdoing such as cheating, dishonesty, lying, cursing and immoral conduct were also punishable, as they were seen as being against the best interests of the community at large.

Shari'ah law required that crimes be punished in accordance with their severity – for example, a man caught drinking in public might have been flogged while a man charged with murder would have received the death penalty – and sentences would only be carried if there was no shadow of a doubt that the crime had been committed. The judges who decided the sentences were prominent members of the community who had displayed both the highest standards of morality and integrity and an in-depth knowledge of the Koran and Sunnah. These judges were expected to pass down sentences which protected the community at large, in accordance with Shari'ah law, and crimes were punished publicly in

order to deter other potential criminals. It was hoped that by targeting the perpetrators of the most heinous crimes against humanity, such as murder, rape and theft, Shari'ah law would eradicate the problem of recidivist crime and thereby improve the daily lives of law-abiding members of the community. Islam forbade individuals from taking the law into their own hands and therefore prohibited honour-killing and other such acts of revenge[363].

4.5.7. Agreements, Contracts and Ownership

In order to ensure that people acted honourably toward one another and that the best interests of the community were always upheld, both the Koran and Sunnah gave specific instruction as to how contracts and agreements between people should be drawn up and fulfilled. In considerable contrast to the chaotic manner in which interactions had taken place prior to the inception of Islam, early Muslims recognised that all of their financial dealings were subject to the law, and that they must always act fairly and leniently in their transactions with others[364].

Under Shari'ah law, contracts were binding regardless of where one lived. All Muslims were required to live according to a strict code of conduct and, while Shari'ah law could not be enforced outside of Islamic territory, even contracts between Muslims and non-Muslims were enforceable everywhere in the Islamic world. All contracts had to be witnessed and recorded to protect the interests of both parties and any contract that was in conflict with Shari'ah law was considered void.

The law required that people's ability to fulfil their promises was always taken into consideration and called for people to act charitably towards one another in all of their dealings. For example, in business contracts, both parties shared equally in loss as well as profit. The charging of interest on money loaned was prohibited, and although it was possible for a person of sound mind to offer himself as security against a loan, it became

[363] Esposito, J.L., 2002, p 144
[364] Sultan, S., 2004, p 300

unlawful for a moneylender to enslave a man who was unable to repay his debts unless such a contract had been drawn up.

As with other aspects of Islam, Shari'ah law always prioritised the welfare of the wider community and it therefore limited individual ownership of anything that was considered necessary for human survival, such as water, salt, public access roads, forests, seas, rivers and other sources of life. The inception of Islam saw the introduction of land reforms under which people were encouraged to cultivate the land and expand agriculture in order to contribute to the maintenance of society and, as every person was seen to have an equal entitlement to resources, people were encouraged to pay zakāt in proportion to their stock and agricultural produce, and for the first time, land owners were forced to pay their labourers.

4.5.8. Rights of Nature

Under the new Islamic social order, even the rights of animals and the environment were enshrined within the law. Although it is true to say that animals had always been respected in Arab society, it now became illegal to treat them inhumanely, and if any animal had to be killed in order to provide food for people, it had to be slaughtered quickly so that its suffering was minimised[365]. Household pets had also to be treated well, and if someone was unable to care for their pets, it was their responsibility to either set them free or find a home for them in which their needs would be met. Early Islam also taught people to be sensible in utilising natural resources by avoiding waste, pollution and destruction. People learned to respect the environment and to appreciate the natural resources with which they had been blessed[366].

4.6. The Religious Debate

Islam believes that each Abrahamic religion that emerged modified the one that preceded it, "Fulfilling, completing and superseding without abolishing." It views early monotheism,

[365] Clark, M., 2003, p 196
[366] Maqsood, R.W., 2006, p 18

with God as the creator, as the elementary foundation[367]. Judaism, Christianity and Islam, therefore, are three evolutionary stages of development, each stage becoming more sophisticated and more widely relevant. It considers all three religions as essential in civilising the human being and in guiding him to salvation. Each stage of development reflected and suited the period in which it grew.

Islam also believes that God endowed his prophets with the ability to perform miracles as well as the skills needed to meet the particular challenges which the times and circumstances presented[368]. For instance, Abraham was faced with the challenge of presenting his message of one, unseen God to an extremely unreceptive people who had many different deities and beliefs. He struggled and endeavoured to try and convince these people of his revolutionary message. The challenge Moses faced was in overcoming the power of the Pharaoh – a god incarnate. Moses was imbued with a presence and a demeanour powerful and confident enough to convince and persuade. The miracles he performed were a divine response to the strength and determination he showed. The challenges during Jesus' time were the social issues of occupation, enslavement, an absence of compassion and a decline in humanity. Therefore, Jesus healed the sick and disabled, in the hope that his example of care would be followed. He preached love, forgiveness and understanding, concepts which challenged the social order. The major challenge later facing Muḥammad and the message of Islam was ignorance, fragmentation and a lack of stimulus for self-improvement. To combat this, Islam brought enlightenment and encouraged people to read, to think and to develop.

The prophet Abraham brought the concept of one unseen God who is the supreme being and creator of the universe and all life on earth. This is a God who was not born as humans are born and has no family or extensions of itself. Everything that exists and occurs in this world is because of God. Humans are made of physical matter but instilled with a soul. The act of worship is a very natural behaviour of all creatures, as they inherently respond to the creator by asking for support. This could be in the form of healing, forgiveness, relief from pain, asking for a change in one's destiny, seeking success, longevity, a dignified life. This

[367] Esposito, J.L., 2002, p 73
[368] Sultan, S., 2004, p 11

worship has no formal pattern and is the process of the created connecting to the creator, the soul connecting to its eventual home. Therefore, the sole purpose of religion is to assist people in worshipping the creator and living according to his laws.

Judaism, based on Moses' teachings, took precedence over and modified the earlier Abrahamic concept[369]. Judaism became the new monotheistic order. The Ten Commandments became the foundation for the Torah. Despite being perceived as exclusive, Judaism was more sophisticated than the basic concept of one God brought by Abraham. In the view of Islam, those who followed Moses, Jewish or not, are considered people of the book[370]. Moses is a great prophet and the Ten Commandments are proof of God's existence. David and Solomon, who came after Moses, were considered prophets by Islam rather than mere kings, each empowered with the ability to perform miracles which continued Moses' legacy of doing good. Islam differs from Judaism on some core beliefs. Islam does not believe that the Messiah has to be a Jewish descendant of David who will rid the world of sin or that Jews are the chosen ones who have been promised a land to return to (Israel). The Islamic perspective of these Jewish beliefs is that they represent an unfounded favouritism on the part of God. Another fundamental difference lies in Judaism not seeing monotheism as evolutionary and, therefore, not accepting either Jesus or Muḥammad. The Islamic perspective of Judaism is that it refuses to accept a message which is universal, preferring to remain exclusive.

With respect to Christianity, Islam believes that when Jesus came to the world, his message modified the earlier teachings of Moses and Judaism. He fine-tuned the message of Judaism by giving it a broader, communal scope. He delivered a more universal message which was to include all mankind. In addition to good over evil, there were new social messages of love, forgiveness and living in harmony. There was an idea of equality between races and colours. This stage of development in monotheistic faiths encompassed deeper philosophies and concepts revolutionary for the time. Islam does not believe that Jesus was Jewish, as the line of prophets from which it is believed Mary descended were not Jewish. Neither does Islam believe that Jesus was the son of God but, rather, a prophet, a man born of a

[369] Gellman, R.M. & Hartman, T., 2002, p 365
[370] Esposito, J.L., 2002, p 75

miraculous conception. While the concept of the trinity adopted by the Byzantine church - the Father, the Son and The Holy Spirit – is a representation of the one God, Islam finds the notion to be contradictory to monotheism. Another point on which Islam disagrees with Christianity is the crucifixion and resurrection[371]. Islam believes that a man who looked like Jesus was captured and crucified and that the real Jesus was unharmed, his subsequent whereabouts being unknown or unrevealed. Given that Islam considers Jesus a prophet, it is his message which is viewed as important, as opposed to the proving of any divinity through death and resurrection. Islam also finds the idea that God allowed Jesus (his son) to be crucified in a sacrificial act, so redeeming a sinful people, illogical, as it is believed that each follower of a monotheistic faith should be held accountable for their own actions and will be judged accordingly on judgement day.

Regarding the Holy Books, Islam believes in Moses' Ten Commandments, the Jewish Torah (The Old Testament) and the New Testament, as books inspired by prophets and composed by man[372]. These writings are considered worthy of respect and are referred to in the Koran but they are not believed to be the actual word of God as the Koran is.

When Islam came it considered Jews and Christians worthy of respect and independence. It called for them to listen to the new message which brought more developed ideas and wider concepts concerning the individual. The previous faiths were not considered void and their abolishment was not called for. Rather, Islam was presented as the next evolutionary stage of monotheistic religion, part of a monotheistic trinity which stood against paganism, superstition, violence, immorality and injustice. Islam's stance on these issues was shared by both Judaism and Christianity and the three were seen as harmonious in many ways, having developed from common origins. Followers of the other faiths were invited to accept Islam but were encouraged to reach this point of acceptance only after engaging in serious thought and discussion[373].

[371] Gellman, R.M. & Hartman, T., 2002, p 11
[372] Gellman, R.M. & Hartman, T., 2002, pp 249 - 256
[373] Clark, M., 2003, pp 270 - 272

According to Islam, as the fundamental beliefs of Judaism, Christianity and Islam are the same, the major differences which evolved between these religious communities were the result of human interpretation of their respective religions. For instance, Judaism itself does not actually grant Jewish exclusivity, nor does it condone usury, but the community wished to live in an insular way. Some concepts within the Christian church, such as Papal infallibility and the requirement to confess through an intermediary, are not part of the fundamentals of Christian belief but are, rather, measures developed by the Christian churches in order to satisfy perceived spiritual requirements. Islam recognised the other monotheistic faiths and believed them to be deserving of protection[374]. Any contradictions to this attitude of acceptance, tolerance and protection are manmade and have no support in the Koran and the teachings of Islam[375].

When Islam was established and began expanding, all other religious communities remained protected. They did not pay zakāt or take arms with the Muslims, but were expected to pay a fixed community tax (jizya). If the non-Muslims required money, it could be made available to them from zakāt funds. Non-Muslim communities would be helped if they faced hardship and they were also entitled to internal self-rule. Represented in Muslim society and in government, non-muslims could choose to govern themselves or be ruled by Muslim laws. There was no identifiable clothing or dress-code, the number of places of worship was not restricted, no foods or social habits were prohibited and there were no naming conventions by which people were easily identified according to their faith. Under Islamic rule, religious communities were united in exercising fairness and expressing empathy. Religious minorities were better treated under Islam than they had been when ruled by the foreign Empires.

4.7. Reaction to Islam

From the time of the first Koranic revelations in AD 610 until the death of Prophet Muḥammad in AD 632, the reactions to Islam amongst the various communities were mixed.

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[374] Clark, M., 2003, p 20
[375] Esposito, J.L., 2002, p 70

The Pagans saw the ideologies of Islam as contradictory to their own and, in some ways, deeply offensive to them. Some Pagans believed in no deity and some believed in a supreme, unseen power. They believed that the deity was so powerful that people couldn't have direct contact with it and, instead, worshipped through an intermediary such as a holy person, a sacred tree or a statue. The Pagans saw Islam as an insult to the worship of their tribal ancestry. They also saw it as demanding, if not tedious. Such requirements as washing, praying five times a day, fasting for a month, the giving of alms and developing and listening to one's conscience interfered with their often hedonistic lifestyle. The conflict Islam presented to the Pagans' ideologies and their way of life meant that they would not accept it.

Islam presented a number of challenges to Zoroastrian beliefs and concepts. Zoroastrianism was the imperial state religion and was believed to be exclusively for Persians. It was seen as a mark of Persian identity. Islam challenged the concept of the hereditary king being a god on earth and owning everything within his realm, including man. It also conflicted with the belief of fire and the Sun being the givers of life and being worshipped as such.

The early Jewish resistance to Islam which took place in Medina resulted in the Jews being represented harshly in the Koran, exacerbating the antipathy between the communities. Given that the Jews perceived themselves as God's chosen people and, by God's decree, the only ones that the laws of Moses were intended to govern, they considered Islam as something apart from themselves. They saw the social teachings of Islam as a threat to their economic practices and rightful accumulation of wealth, a worthy aim as exemplified in their history by David and Solomon. Islam was highly unappealing in its challenge to exclusivity, wealth and the protection of an insular community. The Jewish community met Islam with the same scepticism they had employed with Jesus, when they refused to accept not only his divinity but his message of human universality. Beyond the ideological differences, there was also a very basic human resistance to change.

Christians were charitably treated in the Koran, probably as a result of the assistance the Prophet Muḥammad received from them. Christian reactions to Islam differed depending on denomination. For example, the Jacobite Christians had fled the Roman and Byzantine

church powers to avoid persecution and settled in many parts of Arabia. Despite fundamental differences in beliefs, such as the death of Jesus, they saw nothing alarming or threatening in Islam and welcomed it as a tolerant force under which they thrived. It is believed that prior knowledge of Muḥammad's arrival is contained in this group's version of the bible, the Bible of Barnabas[376], and that Muḥammad himself had contact with them as a youngster[377], which educated him in Christian ways and beliefs[378]. Other Christian minorities living in Arabia, in areas of Najran, Yemen and Oman also did not perceive Islam as a threat. Neither did the monks of St. Catrin in the Sinaii Desert, the Coptic Church in Alexandria and the Christian Church of Abyssinia. In fact, it was these communities which gave Muḥammad protection and support during the crucial, preliminary stages of the consolidation of Islam.

The reaction of the Roman Byzantine churches to the spread of Islam was naturally alarmed and hostile. Initially, they did not know enough about Islam to judge it but the ideological differences between Christianity and Islam, such as the divinity of Jesus, caused the churches to consider Islam heretical[379]. It was seen as an ideology that turned people against the empire and one which threatened to unite slaves, the underprivileged and the outcasts into a formidable force capable of challenging the Byzantine church and the state authority. In the beginning, the church believed that Arab Muslims were Ishmaelites, bloodthirsty hordes and barbarians but, then, this was a view held by both the Byzantine and Roman authorities of any group which challenged their imperial ambitions. Another reaction is that Arab expansion was viewed as being similar to a terrible plague that destroyed people's souls and minds and for which there was no cure except death. The actual repercussions of the presence of the Arabs were largely economic. This previously great empire was suffering trade disadvantages through the loss of port access and a reduced market. It could be considered a predictable reaction, therefore, for the Byzantine state to fight a propaganda war against the Arabs and Muslims by exaggerating the level of terror that people under their jurisdiction had experienced.

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[376] Genesis 21:13, Isaiah 21:13-17
[377] Clark, M., 2003, p 268
[378] Esposito, J.L., 1999, p 306
[379] Esposito, J.L., 1999, p 305

The reaction of both the Roman Church and the Byzantine state to the perceived threat of Islam was to attempt to contain the spread of Islam in an effort to protect their way of life. By doing so, they established a legacy of misrepresentation and rhetorical attack.

The Muslim expansion beyond the Arabian Peninsula and into the Near East took just 30 years[380]. During the leaderships of the first four caliphs, between AD 632 and AD 661, Islam spread northwards to Asia Minor, eastwards to South West Asia and westwards into North Africa. Some of this was through trade, some through missionaries and some was military. The Arabs were able to subdue all the territories previously under the control of the Byzantine Empire in the Levant, Egypt and Asia Minor after the defeat of Heraclius' forces in the Battle of Yarmuk in AD 636, thereby ending seven centuries of Roman rule in the Near East. Simultaneously, they were able to defeat the Sassanian Empire in AD 637 in the Battle of al-Qadisiyya and, by AD 640, the Persian Empire was completely dissolved, to the point where there was no record or chronicles from the Persian side to record the story of the Arab takeover. The Muslim expansion did not stop here. By AD 720, they had managed to reach the Great Wall of China in the east, the Iberian Coast in the west, the Caucuses (the Caspian and the Black Sea) in the north and central Africa.

The consequence of the Muslim expansion in the Near East was that the Byzantine Empire was crippled politically, economically and culturally through the loss of those territories which were essential for its existence. They lost control over key cities such as Damascus, Jerusalem, Alexandria and Carthage, who provided them with raw material, slaves and trading access, allowing them to survive for centuries and thrive against their adversaries.
The rapid spread of Arabs and Islam had a very humiliating effect on the Byzantine Empire. This is partly down to how surprising the expansion must have seemed coming, as it did, from a group of people made up of nomadic, vengeful, self-centred merchants. The Byzantines did not expect these previously fragmented tribes of Arabia, who were considered impoverished and inferior, to muster the unity and courage to take on professional armies. For their part, the Arabs believed that their ability to take on new land and frontiers was a triumph of their faith, a faith which provided them with the motivation to be able to defeat much larger armies better equipped than they were.

[380] Clark, M., 2003, pp 18 - 22

The Arabs brought a new religion and language to areas in which Greek, Latin and Persian were spoken and Arabic became the primary spoken language[381]. New Muslims had to learn Arabic in order to understand the Koran, so a link was established between the language and the faith[382]. People eventually became Arabised, regardless of faith, and the imperial influences on people and territories were gradually severed. Even churches and bibles became Arabised. Through Arabic, which became the language of education, Islamic art, history, culture and philosophy were absorbed. These developed alongside other customs and faiths, within a Muslim framework, to shape a brand new Islamic culture.

The lives of people who came to be under Muslim rule were not adversely affected and there was no enforced Arabisation or conversion. Islam was not intimidated by the presence of other faiths and ideologies. In fact, more churches were built during the Arab rule than had ever been built before. Arab rule initially allowed administrative institutions to continue their work, keeping the same staff of Greek and Persian technocrats, until the slow, Arabic transition was finally complete. Even the production of coins remained unchanged for some time with Persian, Roman and Byzantine coins continuing to be produced. The influx of Arabs coming from Arabia that accompanied the expansion did not have a negative effect on the balance of the population. The Arabs simply integrated with the former Roman and Persian cultures. We must also point out that the majority of the population in northern Arabia, especially in the Levant and Mesopotamia, were Christianised Arabs.

What changed as a result of Arab expansion was that the ruling elite, from the Byzantine and the Persian Empire, who controlled the Near East, were simply replaced by modest Arab governors who were more concerned with doing right than with personal gain, at least at this stage. Their major concern was whether they had done enough for their faith.

[381] Esposito, J.L., 1999, p 312
[382] Esposito, J.L., 2002, p 9

Chapter 5: Conclusions

5.1. Arabia

The geography and the physical setting of the Arabian Peninsula had a profound effect on its inhabitants, their demographic distribution and their activities. The mild weather of northern and southern Arabia, coupled with the absence of natural disasters, allowed the inhabitants of Arabia the opportunity to develop advanced lifestyles faster than the populations of other continents.

The Arab people, as recognised today, whether of Semitic origin or not, are the descendants of the early inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula, who populated the land and developed sophisticated cultures and kingdoms. Therefore, a misconception arises from the naming of the early inhabitants according to where they settled, giving the impression that each kingdom existed as a separate entity, unrelated either to each other or to the place they originated from and, therefore, ultimately suggesting that there is no relationship with Arabs of today. It was those early kingdoms, which predate the Persian, Greek and Roman empires, which laid the foundations for a civilisation whose qualities would spread around the world. They produced the earliest standards of culture and development which acted as catalysts for the development of other nations.

Prior to the 6th century the two great empires, Sassanian and Byzantine, were constantly fighting each other, creating a continuous state of political and economic unrest in the region. In an attempt to protect their own territories, the Sassanians and the Byzantines used the Fertile Crescent and Northern Arabia as an arena for their hostilities and used the client states within this area as a buffer. The adverse effects upon the indigenous Arabs ranged from severe disruption of trade to being pressed or enslaved by the forces of these empires. Further south, Arabs enjoyed an autonomous position between these two spheres of influence but beyond the jurisdiction of either. These conflicts resulted in a number of religious communities, such as Jews and Jacobite Christians, seeking refuge in Arabia and settling peacefully there. Arabia in the 6th Century was not considered of strategic importance but Arabs played a major role in facilitating trade and communication between

the empires and traders of Africa and Asia. Mecca played a key role in trade and religion and, it could be said, developed a successful amalgamation of the two. Arabs and non-Arabs, along with members of different religions, visited Mecca as a holy place, a place for pilgrimage and a focus for trade and social exchange.

The Arabians of this time had a unified culture linked by a common language with an oral literary tradition. They were knowledgeable about modern technological advances, thanks to the contact they had with foreign traders. The Bedouin tribes, who made up only a small proportion of Arabia's inhabitants, formed a link between the settled tribes, as they took their caravans all over the peninsula.

5.2. Muḥammad

Muḥammad's position as an orphan in a tribal society, where a hierarchy is adhered to, familial relationships are of the utmost importance and not belonging is tantamount to being an outcast, must have presented real challenges to a young boy. It may have been this position which led him to be acutely aware of the society of his environment as a whole, its injustices, its reliance on tribal connections and its inequalities. Whilst young, Muḥammad developed wisdom and maturity beyond his years, qualities which must have been recognised by his uncles who considered him worthy of their special attention and took him on their travels. These experiences broadened his knowledge and his interests and may have influenced his thinking in terms of ideologies and religions.

In adulthood he gained a reputation as an unbiased mediator and diplomat. His skills were called upon when a quarrel took place among the tribes about who would have the honour of carrying the Mecca Black Stone to the Ka'ba. Muḥammad proposed an amicable solution which benefited all parties, thereby diffusing what could have become a volatile situation. That he was able to convince all sides to agree to his proposal is a testimony not only of his skills but also of his credibility among disparate groups. Such diplomacy impressed Khadījah enough for this wealthy widow to want to marry this younger man who lacked both material possessions and position. Even at this stage in his life, Muḥammad must have presented a maturity and charisma which set him apart from the people around

him. Her trust in him didn't waver with his solitary mountain meditations and, when one of these yielded his first revelation, she was the first to believe him.

As a strategist, Muḥammad seems to have been faultless. He knew that the atmosphere of secrecy in which he initially spread his message was a necessity, without which he and his followers would be decried if not killed. Seeking shelter and help from the Christian king of Abyssinia displayed political shrewdness and leadership and sending a group of his followers away to avoid persecution displayed a fundamental humanity. Diplomatic and political skills were again evident in the establishing of a power base in Medina. As visitors from Mecca coming amongst a tribal society inherently mistrustful of outsiders, Muḥammad's ability to gain support for himself and his followers shows the enormous effect he had on those he came into contact with. His further building upon and consolidation of his position through the introduction of constitutions and treaties shows remarkable statesmanship, despite he himself being illiterate. In his peaceful gaining of Mecca, he again showed leadership and considerable negotiation skills. In his dealing with the Qurayysh, he showed himself to be an excellent military tactician who consulted others and listened to their advice. He also played a role in every part of military manoeuvres, such as when he helped dig the trench north of Medina.

Accepting that Muḥammad was unusually gifted in many areas, it was perhaps his absolute confidence in his message which led to him being lauded and followed by so many. Such belief had to be absolute in order for him to contact heads of state and urge them to accept Islam in the firm but diplomatic way he did, acknowledging their religions but accepting the responsibilities of his own unique position – that of prophet.

All of these qualities were born and developed in an environment which presented constant challenges – geographical, political and intellectual. In surroundings which were often harsh, Muḥammad's time frequently belonged to the constant stream of people who came to him for advice and for answers. Some of the biggest challenges he faced were intellectual ones. The interpretation, understanding and explanation of his revelations required considerable acumen, intelligence and analytical abilities. This uneducated, illiterate man's claims did not go unchallenged, yet he answered each question with a

convincing argument, displaying linguistic deftness which should have been beyond his reach. Every argument he posited was clear in its aims and was supported by actions.

5.3. The Rāshīdūn Period

The initial objective of the Prophet was to rid Arabia of paganism, allowing the followers of other religions to continue living their lives according to their faiths. A secondary objective was to unite all Arabian people in Arabia under the banner of Islam, whilst still allowing people of other religions the freedom to practise in a tolerant environment. A further aim was to convince the great powers of the time to allow their people to hear the message of Islam and to be free to embrace it if they chose. This last aim led to inevitable conflict.

The great powers were extremely alarmed about the spread of Islam and saw it as a threat, a force which they believed directly challenged their social order, their way of life and their position of power. They were unwilling to permit its message to be spread and were prepared to resist it. This resistance was purely military and not civilian and the expansion would not in fact have been possible without the support of the local populations[383]. Under the Byzantine and Sassanian occupiers, the people felt that for centuries their lifestyles had been suppressed, their civil liberties violated and their freedoms stifled. They could be enslaved at the will of the ruling empires and their homes could be looted or destroyed and their wealth confiscated. Had they perceived the Muslims as new occupiers or conquerors, or believed that the Muslims would tax them unfairly, they would have resisted them by joining the fighting forces of the ruling occupiers. The Sassanians and the Byzantines had taken the land by force and had made the Fertile Crescent a theatre for conflict, so neither enjoyed the loyalty of the indigenous Arab population. Those spreading the word of Islam were Arabian, just like the local people, so the Muslims were seen not as occupiers but as liberators. The fact that the early Muslims' military victories were never followed by famine, civil war, ethnic cleansing or reprisals among the different factions, races and tribes

[383] Lewis, B., 2002, pp 57, 58

is evidence of the peoples' willingness to welcome or embrace Islam once they had been exposed to its message[384].

One of the reasons why the Muslims were able to make leadership transitions peacefully was that they initially left existing systems intact. Rather than attempting to alter the ways in which people had become accustomed to doing things, they continued the administrative frameworks established by the former empires, which not only solved the organisational challenge that confronted them but also won further support from the local people for the Muslim cause.

The battle of Siffin of AD 656 must not be taken as a large-scale civil war engulfing the whole of Arabia and the new Muslim territories. Rather, it was actually a battle which represented a power struggle between two leaders and their followers. The conflict did not involve the ideological division of a nation and the wholesale civilian involvement which a civil war defines. Moreover, the battle does not provide evidence of inherent Muslim aggression or the violent spreading of Islam but rather the unfortunate result of an infant nation struggling for stability. The new challenges facing the Muslims in their attempts to unite a vast and continuously growing region included accommodating those people embracing Islam as well as those with different religious orientations, administrating a population of diverse ethnicity and governing newly opened frontiers and territories with varied geography. These new problems could not be resolved by the early tribal systems of Arabia or by centralised government from Mecca or Medina, so a new system was required. These challenges prompted the Arabs to think of new technologies, new sciences and new ideas to facilitate communication systems and the administration and economic management of provinces. The moulding of a culture into a form which is simultaneously Islamic but agreeable to non-Muslims could not be achieved without some dissent and disagreement. Despite not being fought on imperial grounds, the battle of Siffin became the first step in catapulting the new Islamic state into an empire.

[384] Brown, D., 2004, p 7

5.4. Islam

Islam sees itself as the final evolutionary stage of Abrahamic monotheism. Its message is universal to all mankind and its teachings go beyond those of Moses and Jesus. Islam was a revolutionary religion, capable of being adapted for any time or group of people. It fulfilled a need in people of the 6th century for their faith to contain an intellectual and cultural dimension. Whilst noting that it is God's prerogative to send new prophets or new religions if he so chooses, Islam is complete and capable of confronting and dealing with any new challenge. Islam believes itself to be a religion of reason, logic and nature. It engages the mind and the body in the worshipping of God and living by his way. It calls on all people under Islamic governance to comply with Islamic law, regardless of faith.

In order for Islam to meet the challenges demanded by the progress of life, its apparatus allow people to legislate and govern themselves within the directives of the Koran and Sunnah. These apparatus, designed to aid the Muslim community in finding solutions to their life, allow Islam to have the required flexibility and wisdom to adapt to new situations and issues. These legislative tools place the welfare and interests of the community above those of the individual, encouraging each person to be accountable for their own actions at all times. This means that anything which impedes judgement or results in a lack of control is prohibited as it creates an obstacle between man and faith. So whilst being conservative, the rules are considered practical and are not rigid. That is to say, actions are judged on their consequences for both the public and the individual and on whether the benefits outweigh the costs.

Shariah law pertains to all areas of life, not just the religious. Social, legal, economic and political areas are covered. The conservation of marriage and family life is a primary concern in Islam and Shariah law protects women, children, slaves and non-muslims. Because a subject is mentioned in Shariah law, it does not mean that that subject is considered religious. Islam holds that, without the rule of law, a community cannot enjoy the safety, peace and prosperity that structure brings. But it is important to have the type of structure under which people can govern themselves, one which encourages fairness in all areas of life.

The intricate ideologies, jurisprudence and laws of Islam, which set it above other monotheistic religions, must have seemed revolutionary in the 6th century. The reaction of other communities was mixed. Those who opposed it did so not because they believed Islam to be inherently bad. Some felt threatened by the social ideologies it preached, such as equality between men and women and rights for children and slaves. These ideals threatened their wealth and their social standing. Some found Islam too demanding or unattractive in what it required of its followers – hard work, fasting, avoiding vice. Others simply resisted change. In some quarters, Islam was perceived to be worrying and dangerous because of its ability to find solutions to every problem of life. The strongest resistance came from those religious institutions which felt undermined by the Islamic practice of worshipping without an intermediary.

5.5. Addressing Today's Questions

The questions outlined in the abstract were as follows:

3. Are there any real grounds for the widely-held perception of the Arab people as a backward race, uncivilised, fragmented, unwilling to develop and making no contribution to the international community? Does their history support this perception?
4. Do the origins of Islam and the way it developed and expanded during its earliest days support current criticisms that Islam itself is an inherently violent religion?

In discussing the history of the Arab people, we have shown their contribution to civilisation in the context of the political, social and economic situation of the 6th century. We have shown that Islam as a faith is closely entwined with Judaism and Christianity, that they are, in fact, branches of the same tree, and that Islam provides no support, no encouragement and no instruction for violence and violent acts. It is not within the scope of this work to discuss at length the history of the misrepresentation of Islam but parallels between the earliest opposition which Islam encountered and attitudes currently thriving in the West can be highlighted.

The common understanding is that the nature of all religions is to be a civilising force, improving humans and humanity, fighting evil and ignorance. Problems arise when Islam is taken to be a brand representing great swathes of the globe and all which occurs there. Opposition to Islam should be considered symbolic, rather than representing real opposition to the faith. This opposition is symptomatic of groups of people who oppose the results of Islam, for instance, the uniting of people with little power against a powerful elite. Such groups fight as unholy those which present political and imperial opposition. The main problematic result of such opposition is usually a threat to economic stability or growth, be it the present threat to US oil access or the historical threat to Byzantine port access. A threat to economic stability or growth will always be acted upon, frequently under the auspices of some ideological opposition. Those presenting the threat will be considered inferior, regardless of how developed and complex their culture may be, just as the Romans considered the Celts barbarians and just as the Byzantines considered the early Muslims backward desert-dwellers. Hostility towards Islam has existed right from its earliest days. Though expressed in terms of ideological differences, political and economic reasons are usually the driving forces behind the hostility.

The misrepresentation of Islam, like any misrepresentation, is down to perception and presentation. Rather than questioning what a group believes and what their aims are, a decision is made about their beliefs and aims according to what the fears of the other group may be. This is a reactionary process. Arguments are then formed and presented in a way which exploits these fears. So when George W. Bush claims that, "The object of terrorism is to try to force us to change our way of life,"[385] he has decided that this is the terrorists' aim based on the fact that it is a widely-held, American fear, rather than really questioning the terrorists' purpose. That this abstract fear is so often quoted not only exploits the insecurities of the American people, it is also a fundamentally flawed argument. How does a terrorist attack threaten a way of life? What, specifically, happens in the United States which terrorists want to prevent and how could the murder of innocent people be considered by anyone to be instrumental in its prevention? Is it the case that some terrorists wish to see an end to the US voting system, to insurance-based healthcare or to the film

[385] Remarks in photo opportunity with Members of Congress, Washington D.C., October 23rd 2001, as reported on US Department of State website.

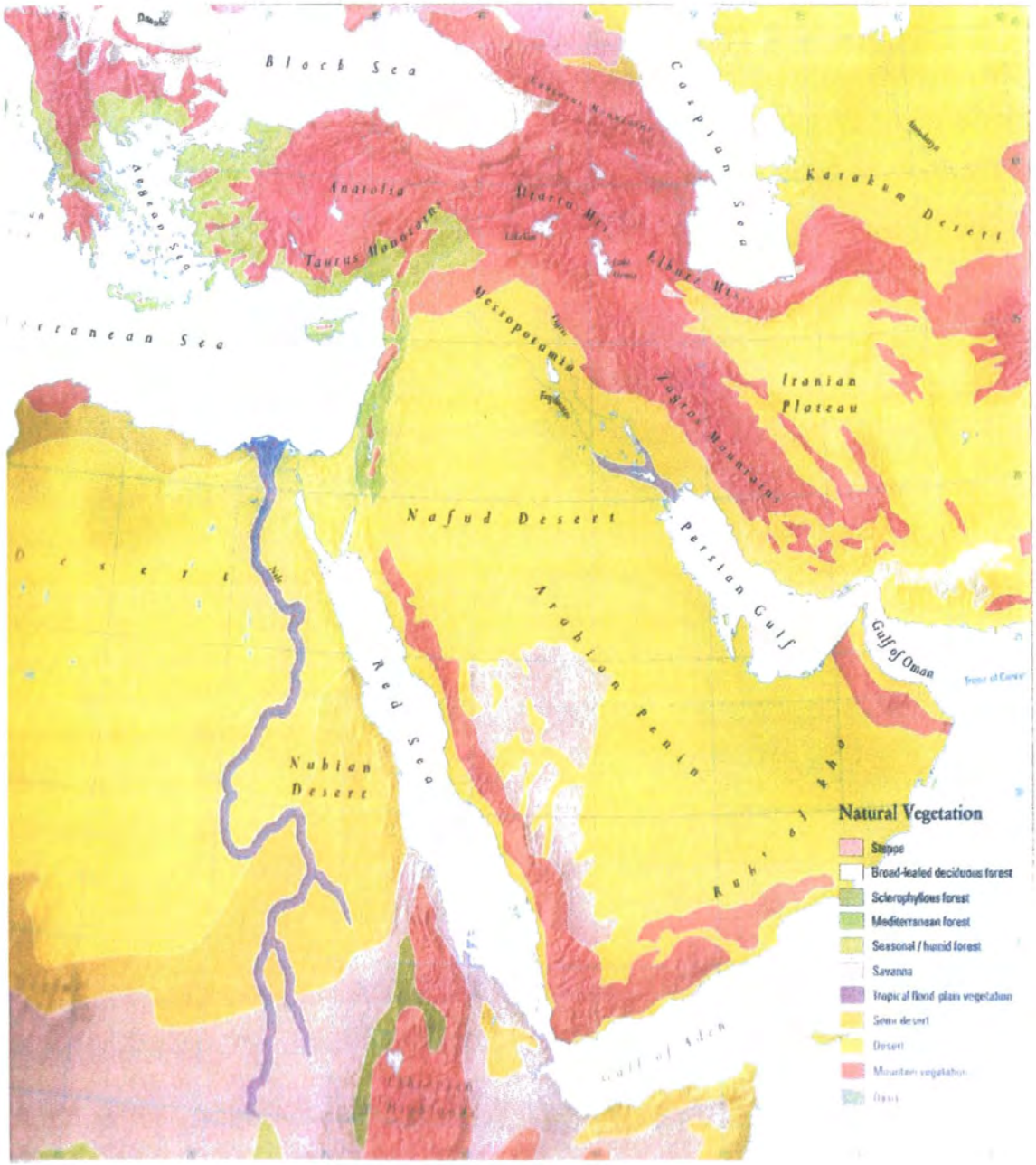
studios of Hollywood? It seems to be the case that the words themselves don't really matter, neither do the numerous suggestions which they could imply. What matters is perception and presentation. When terrorists are perceived as a threat not to a number of human lives but to a whole way of life, no matter how abstract, that perception can be maximised and presented as good reason for actions which may otherwise be disputed. When presented in such a way as to exploit inherent fears, the reactionary argument can be broadened to include not only terrorists, essentially a group of criminals, but a whole religion to which these few are linked.

In the aftermath of 9/11, Islam as a religion and ideology was branded as a dangerous and hostile faith which called for people to commit heinous acts of barbarism. It was viewed as a threat which had to be contained physically. An intellectual rationale was sought in order to justify this campaign, based on a portrayal of Islam as a faith which has never brought anything but hostility and bloodshed to the world. Documentary evidence was researched and successfully presented as proof of the violence and intolerance inherent in Islam. But then, critics of the Christian churches have always been able to find documentary evidence in the bible of Christianity's inherent violence and intolerance. One reason why the misrepresentation of Islam can continue unabated is that there is a dearth of writers and scholars in the Arab and Muslim worlds equipped to offer an opposing argument and a balanced defence of Islam. While the criticisms from the West continue to be met with little more than a reactionary expression of offence, some followers of Islam will continue to feel undefended within the realms of international diplomacy and anti-Islamic propaganda will continue to flourish. In this absence of a balanced dialogue, some of those followers of Islam who feel affronted and undefended could resort to violence in an attempt to fulfil what they see as a religious duty to defend their faith when it is being attacked. This would be a defence of a faith, rather than an attempt to defend a way of life. By the mere presence of Western forces in the Middle East, reactions will occur which can be perceived as barbaric. This is no different to what has been witnessed throughout history when a major power is seen by the indigenous population as unwelcome, imperial colonials. What is different is that, in today's world, the theatre of conflict can reach across the globe, rather than being confined to the land of the colonised.

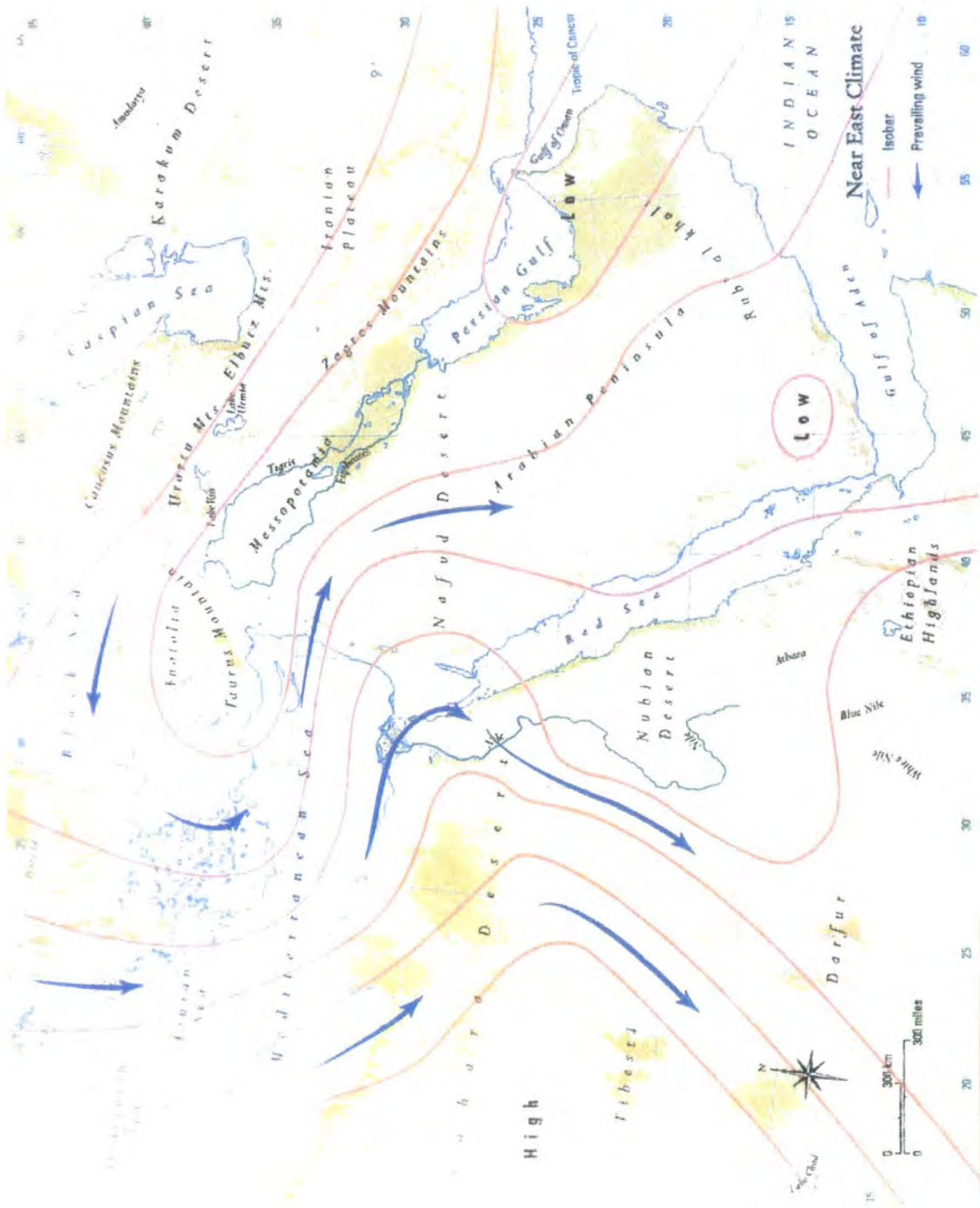
Concerning how this situation can be resolved, the warning to any government which perceives itself as the most powerful and best-equipped is that the side who in the end prevails will not be the most powerful but the one which is prepared to pay the higher price. However, the side with the most power, the one with the upper hand, holds the key to resolution because the other side is merely reactionary and will continue to react as long as it feels attacked and as long as there is no controlled, sensible, balanced dialogue between them.

Appendix 1

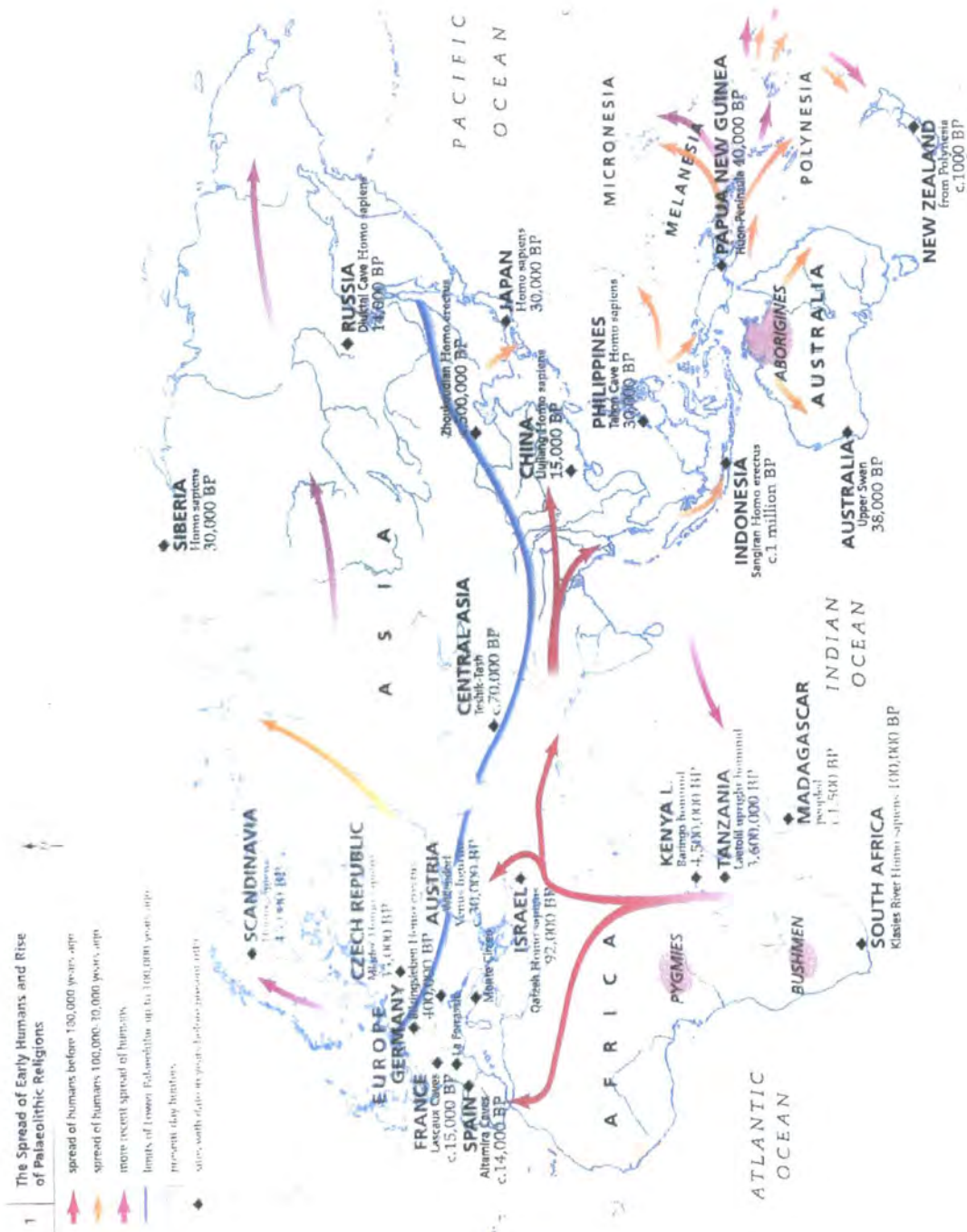
Maps



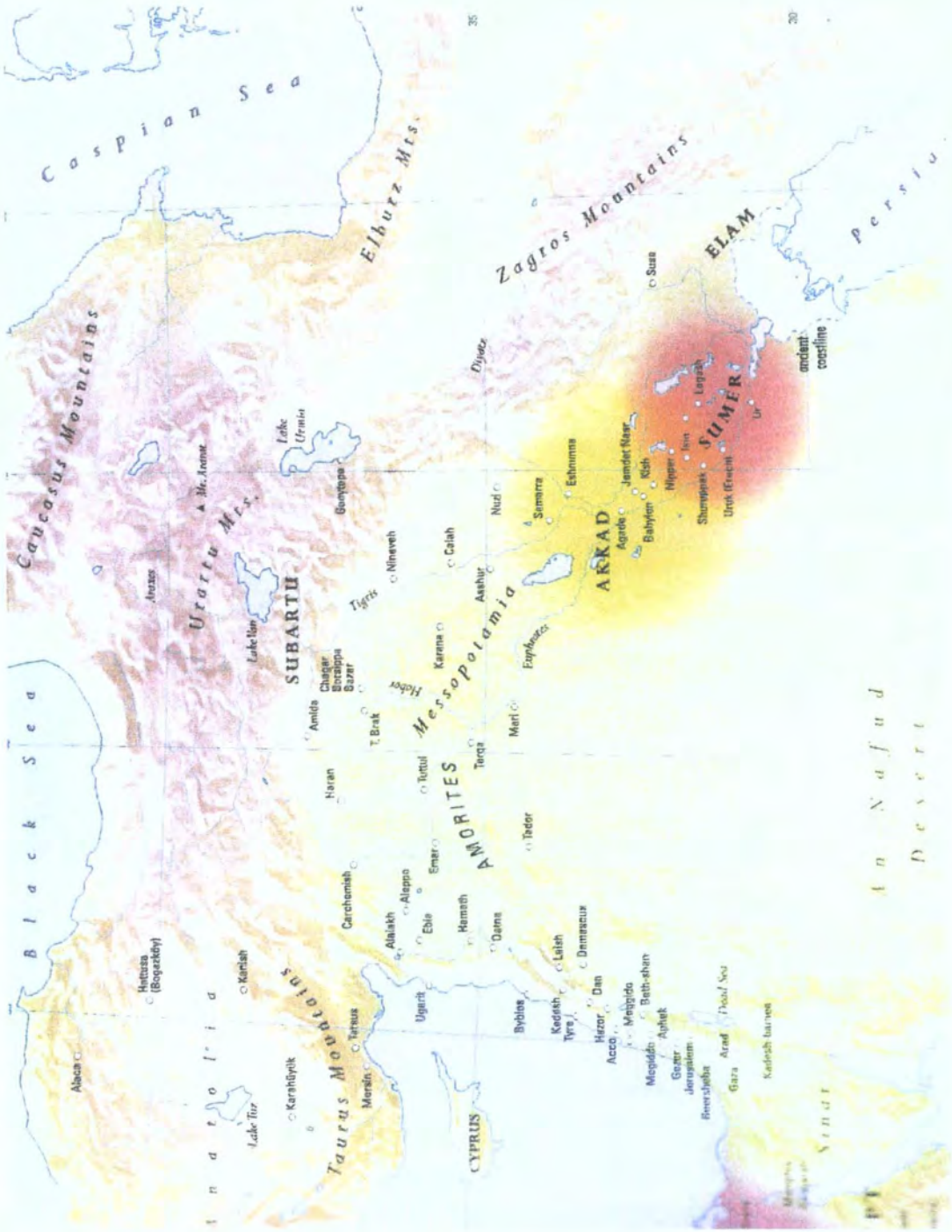
Map 1 **Physical Geography of Arabia** (Barnes, I., 2006, p 17)



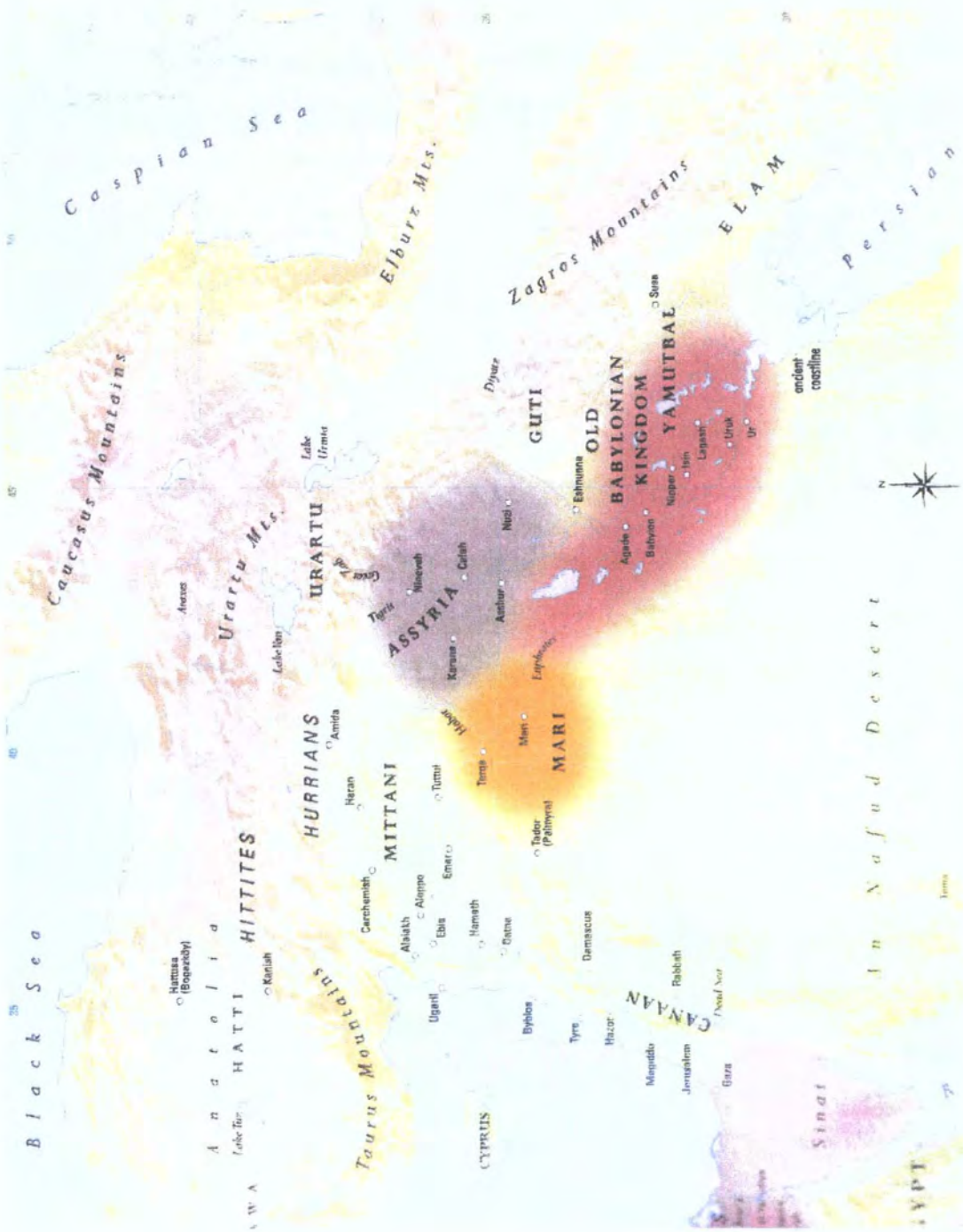
Map 2 **Climate Patterns of Arabia** (Barnes, I., 2006, p 15)



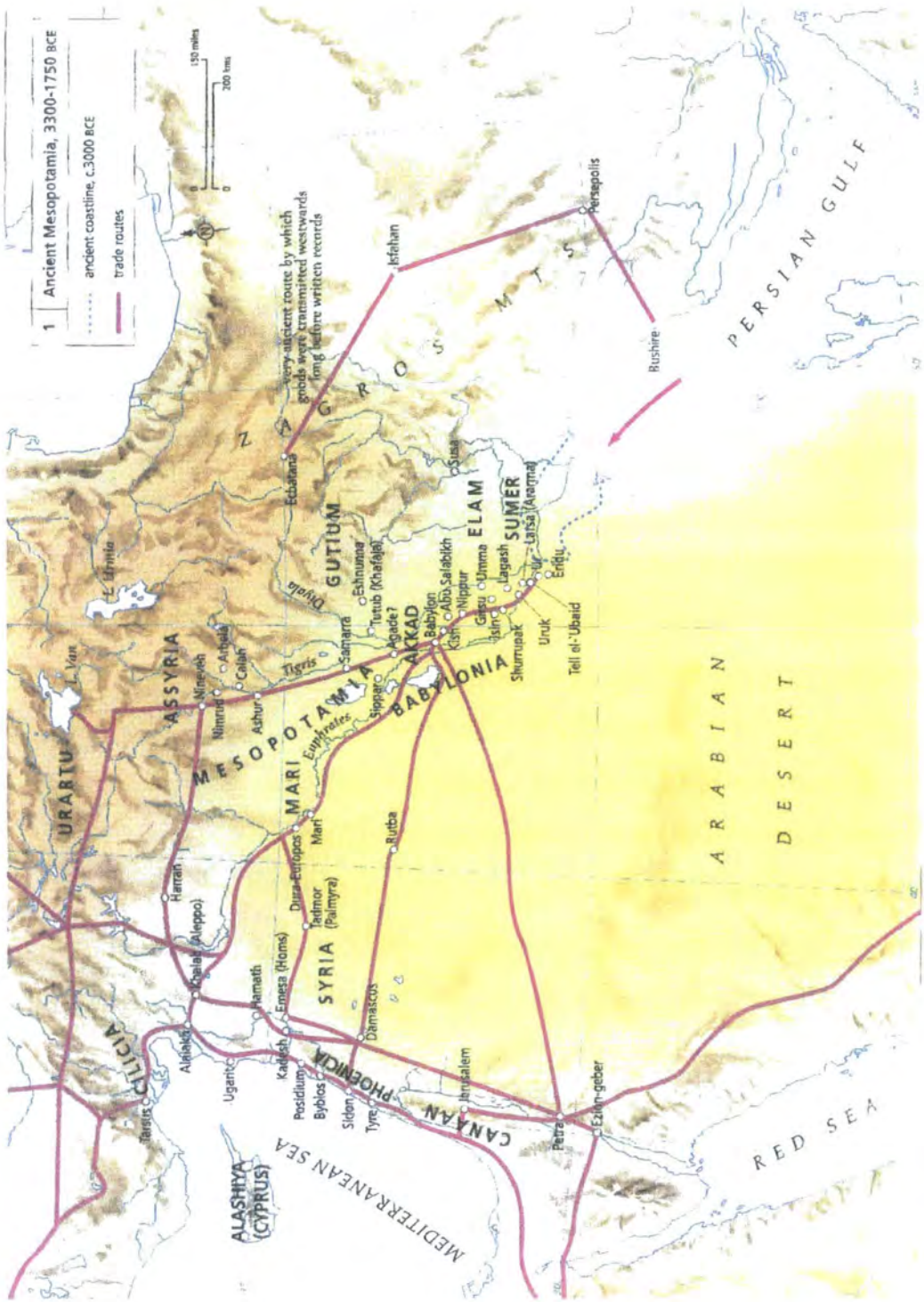
Map 3 **Semitic Origins in Africa** (Smart, N., 1999, p 18)



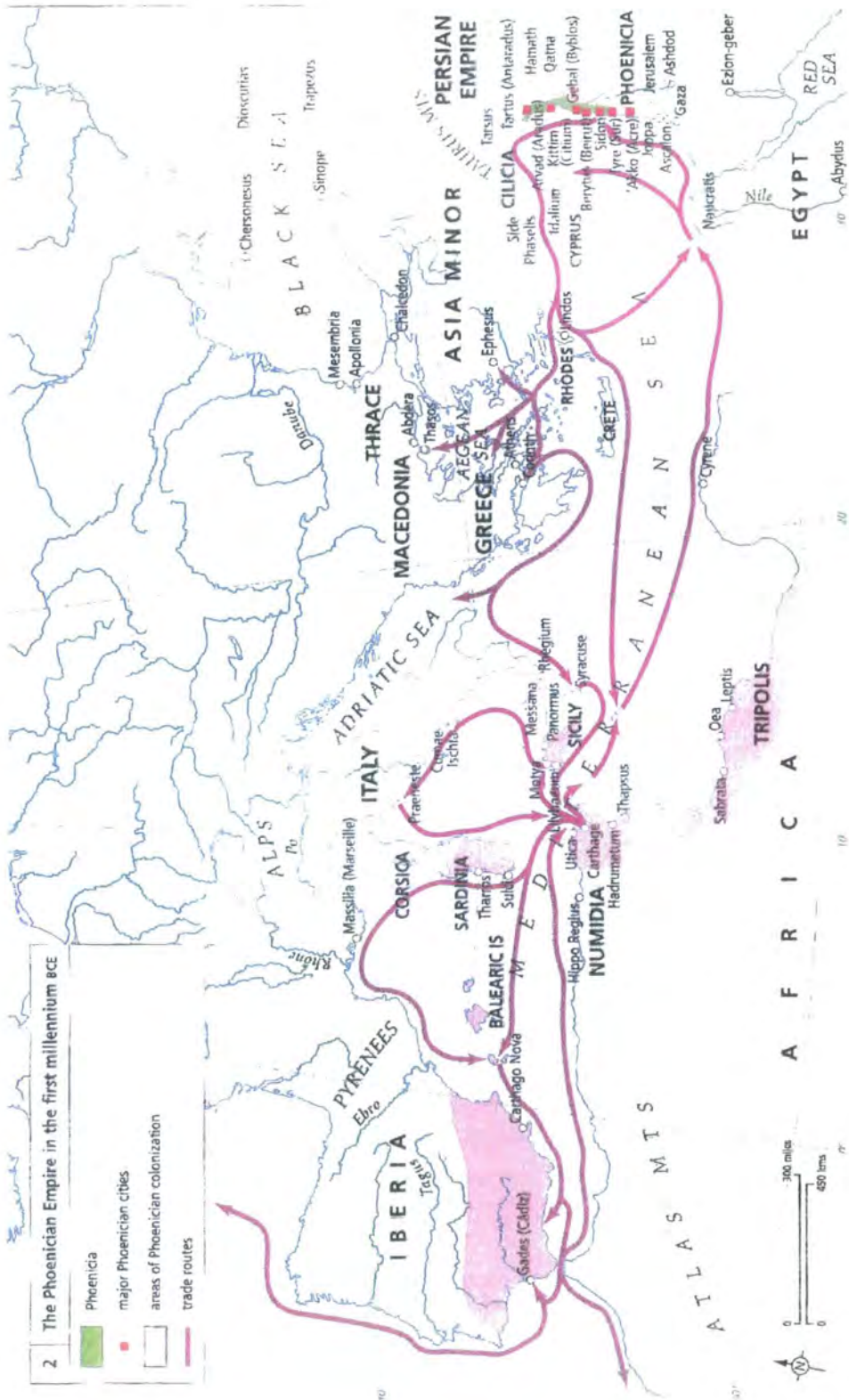
Map 4 **Sumerian and Akkadian Kingdoms** (Barnes, I., 2006, p 23)



Map 5 **Babylonian, Assyrian and Ammorite Kingdoms**
(Barnes, I., 2006, p 47)

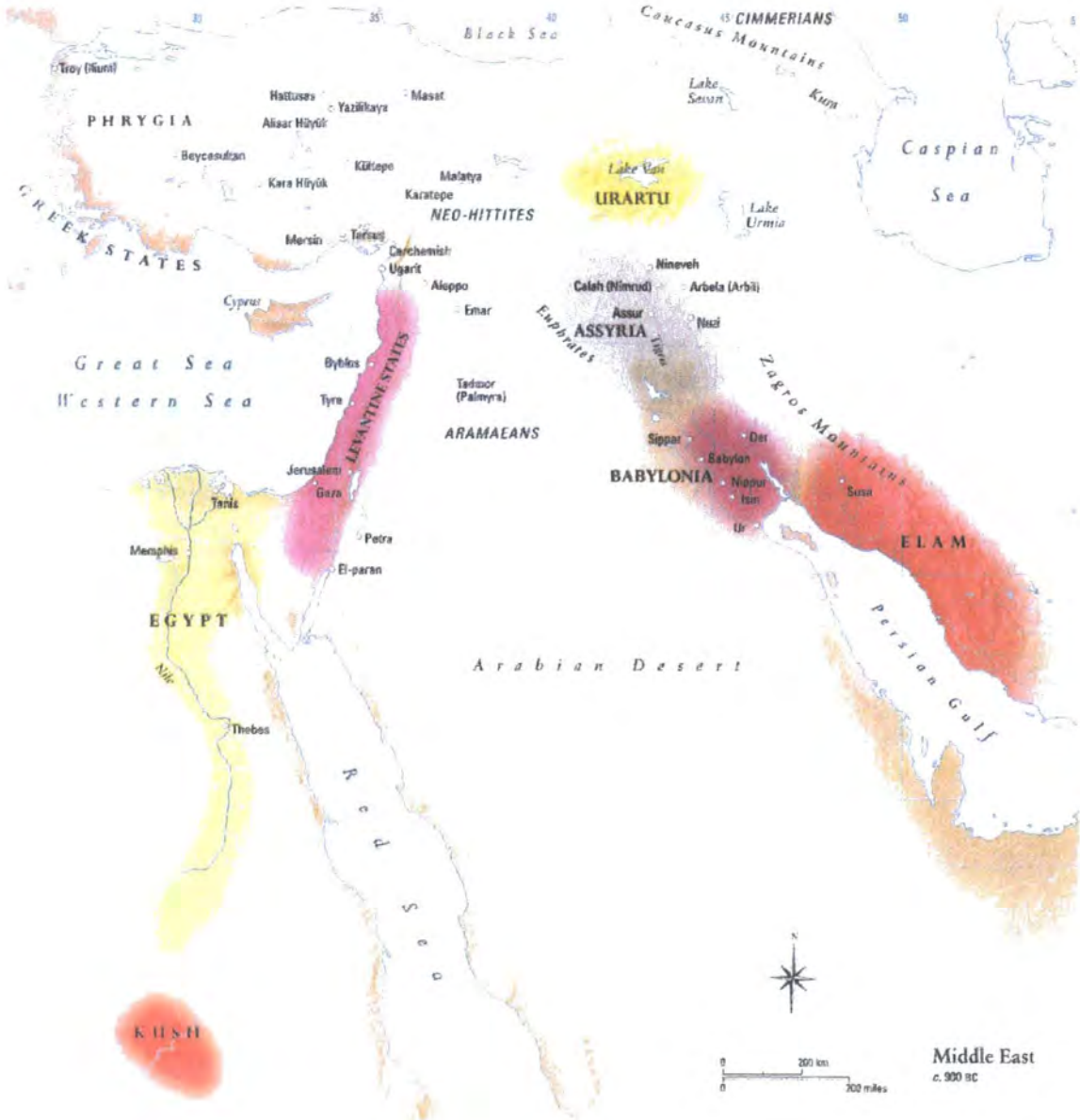


Map 6 **Phoenician and Caananite Kingdoms** (Smart, N., 1999, p 98)

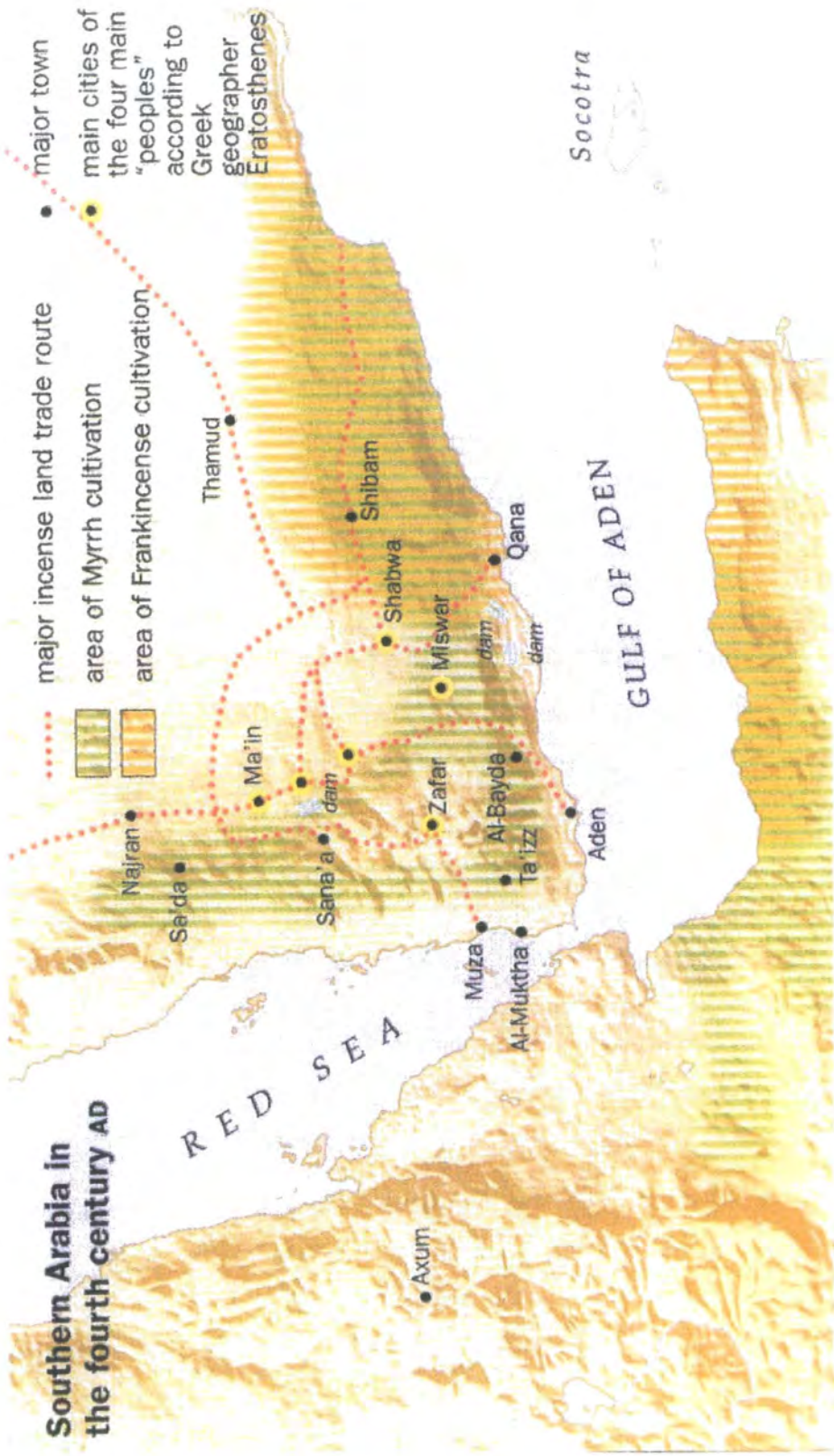


Map 7 **Phoenician Empire Trade Routes** (Smart, N., 1999, p 103)

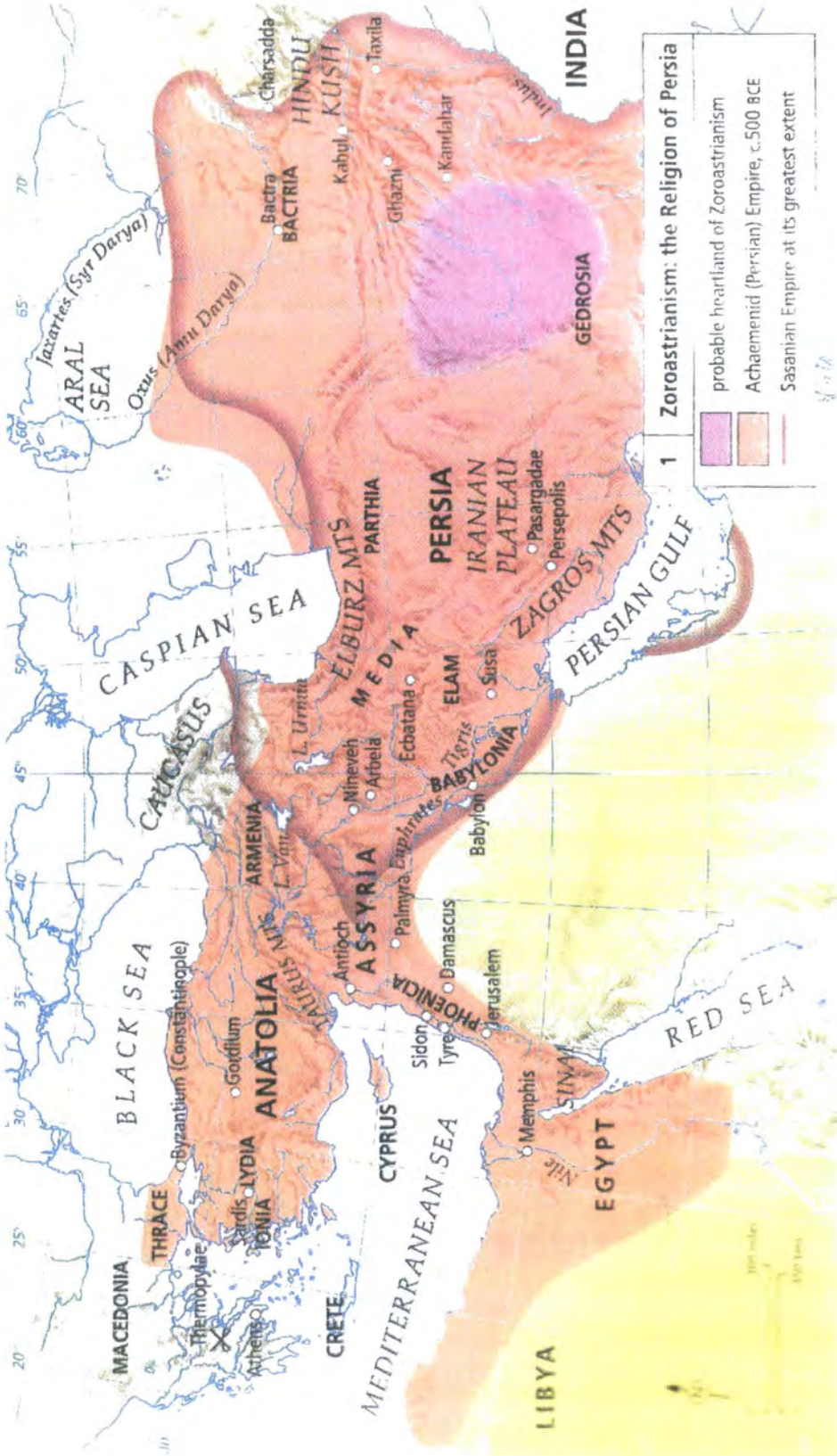
Map 8 **Empire of Solomon** (Barnes, I., 2006, p 122)



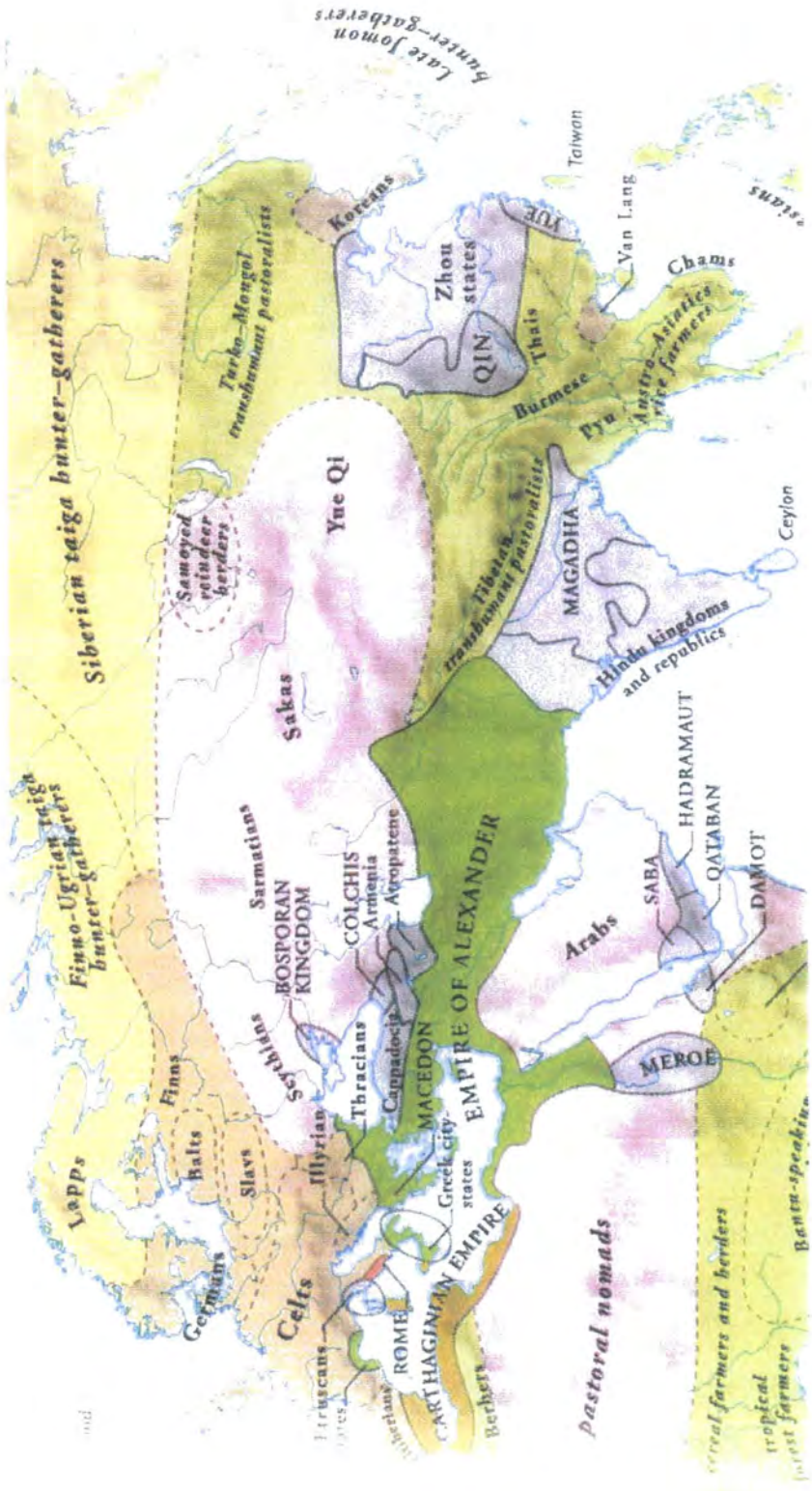
Map 9 **Kingdoms of Palmyra and Petra** (Barnes, I., 2006, p 145)



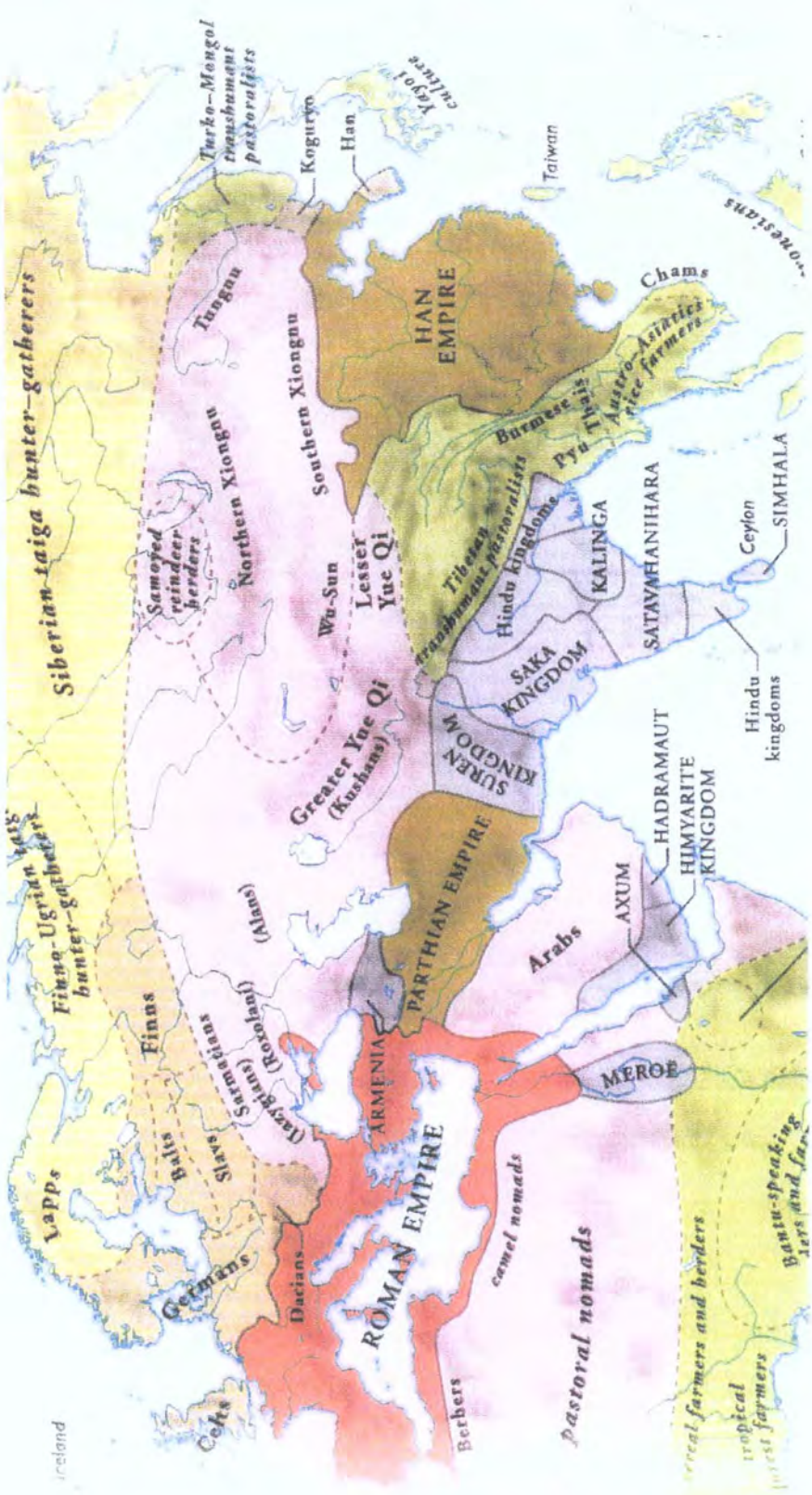
Map 10 **Ma'in, Sabaean and Ammorite Kingdoms** (Nicolle, D., 2004, p16)



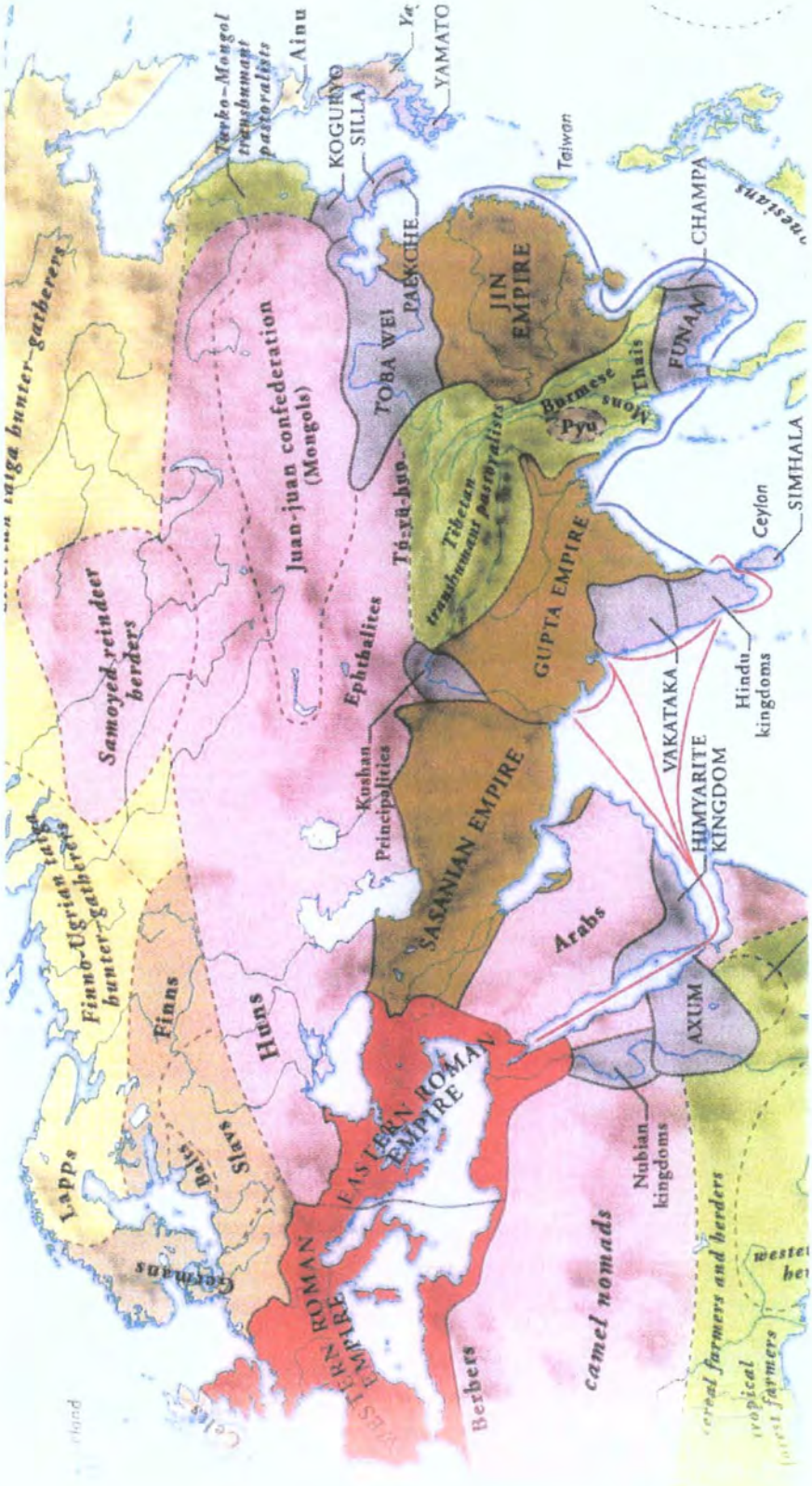
Map 11 **Persian Empire** (Smart, N., 1999, p 108)



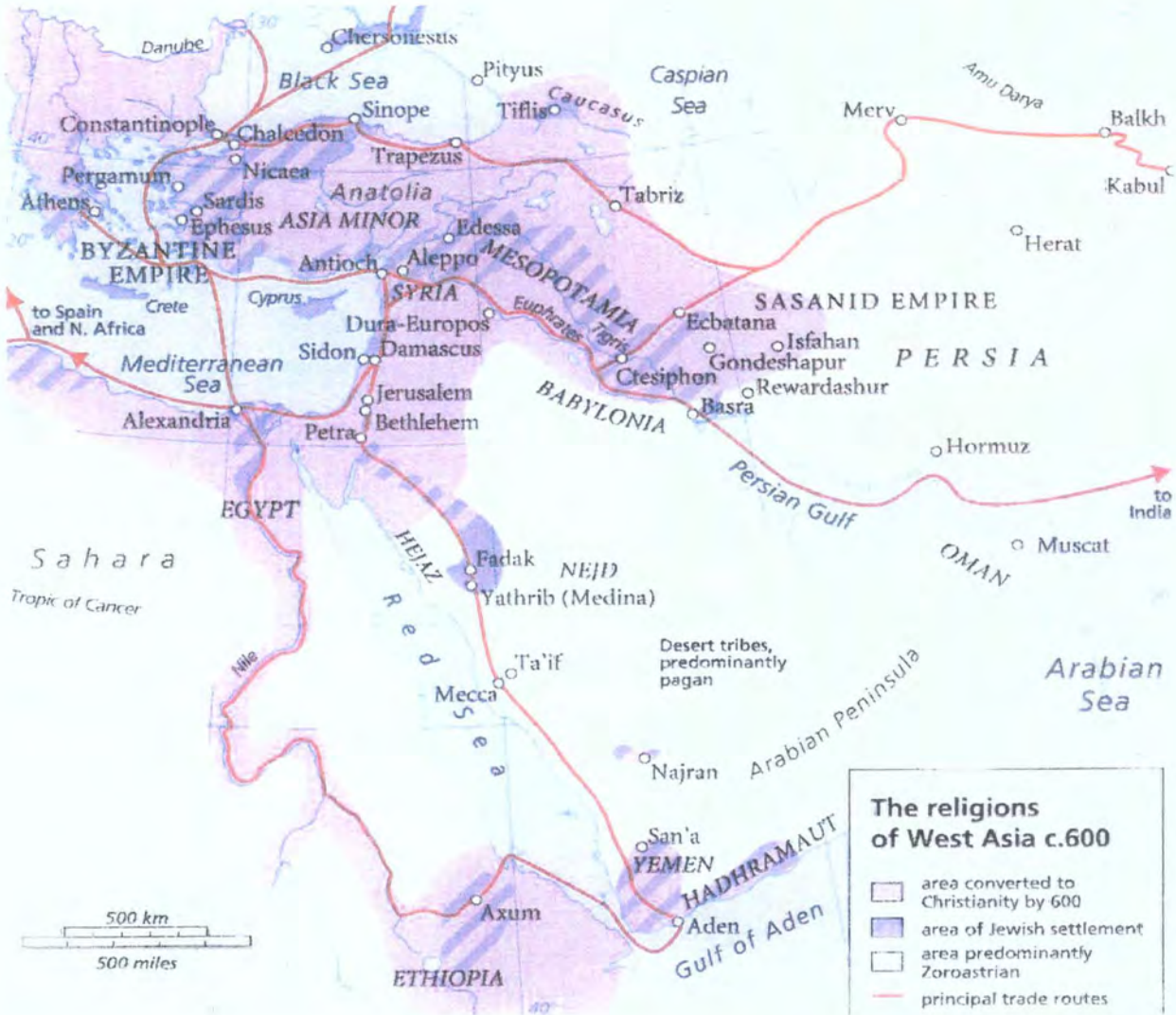
Map 12 **Empire of Alexander the Great** (Haywood.J., 2001, p 2.01)



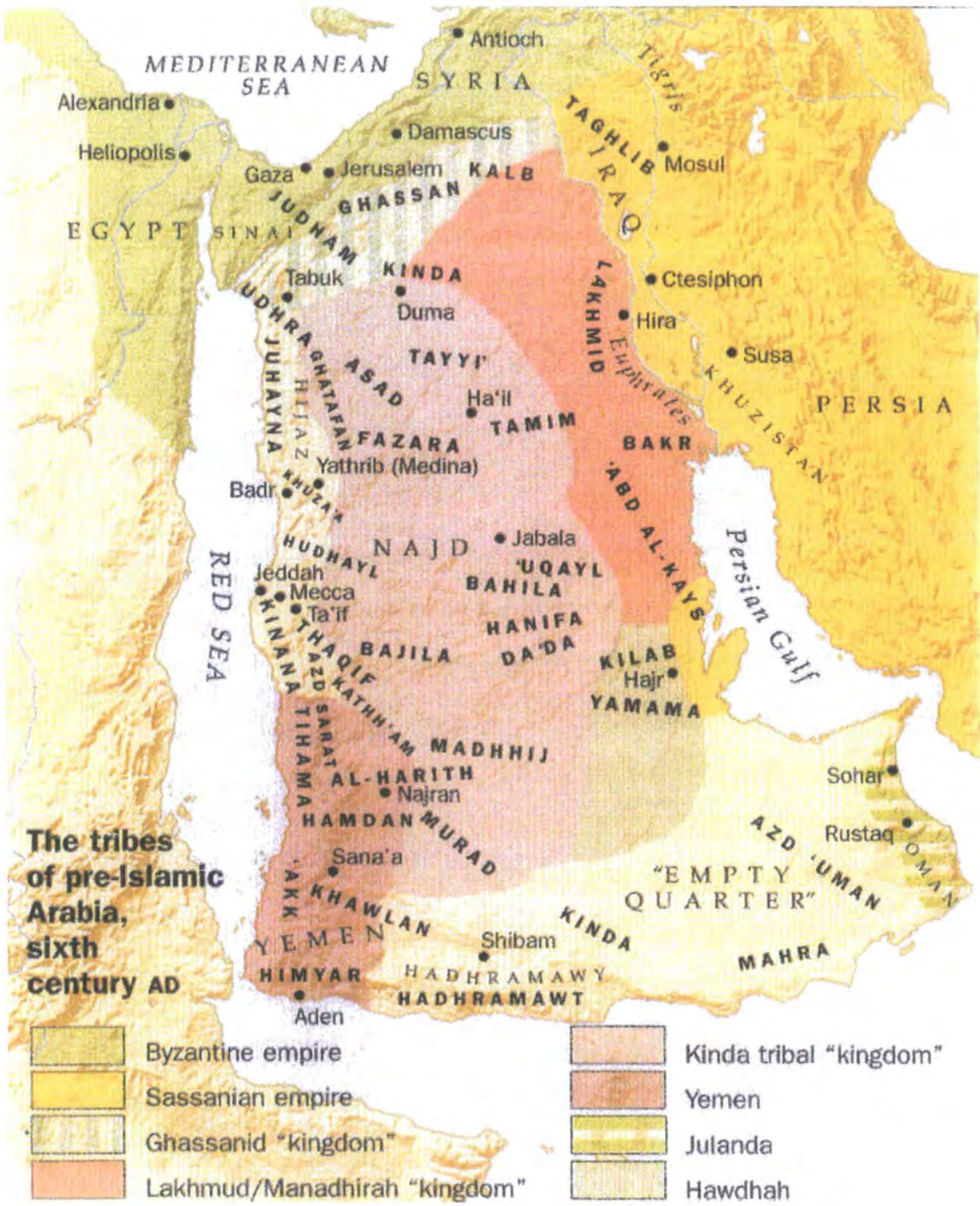
Map 13 **The Roman and Parthinian Empire** (Haywood.J., 2001, p 2.03)



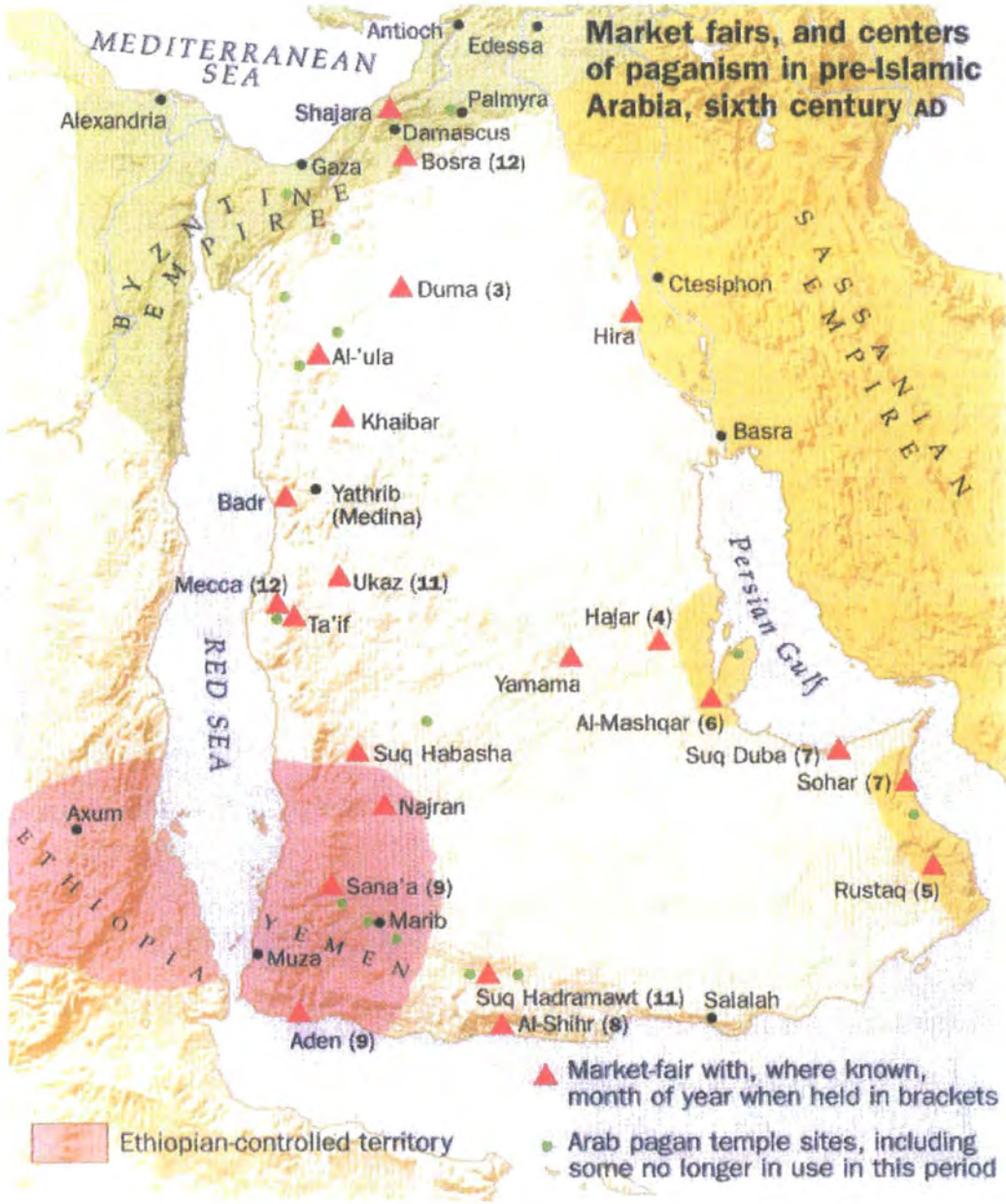
Map 14 **Byzantine and Sassanian Empires** (Haywood.J., 2001, p 2.04)



Map 15 **Religions of Arabia** (Lunde, P., 2002, p17)

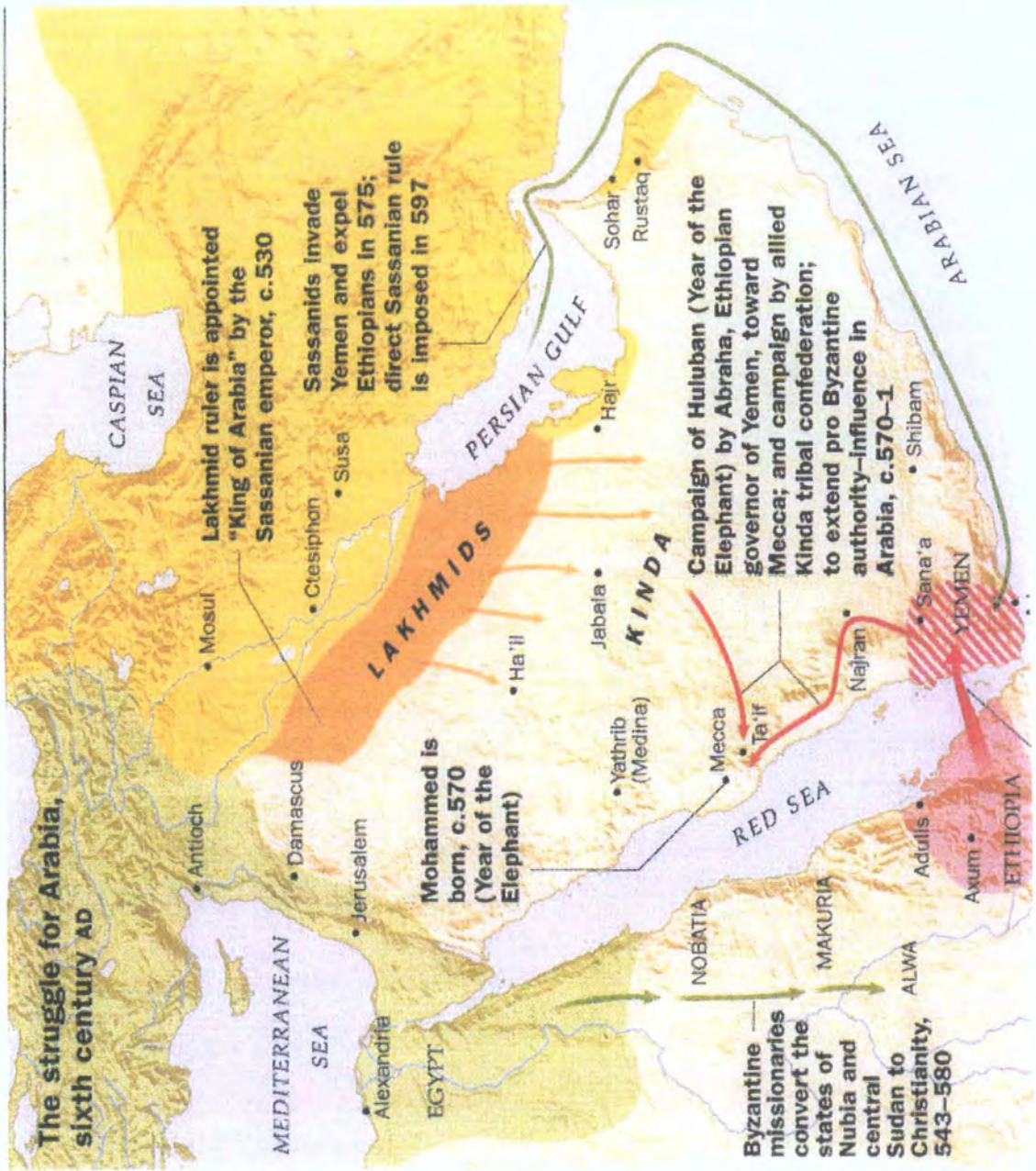


Map 16 **Tribes of Arabia** (Nicolle, D., 2004, p13)



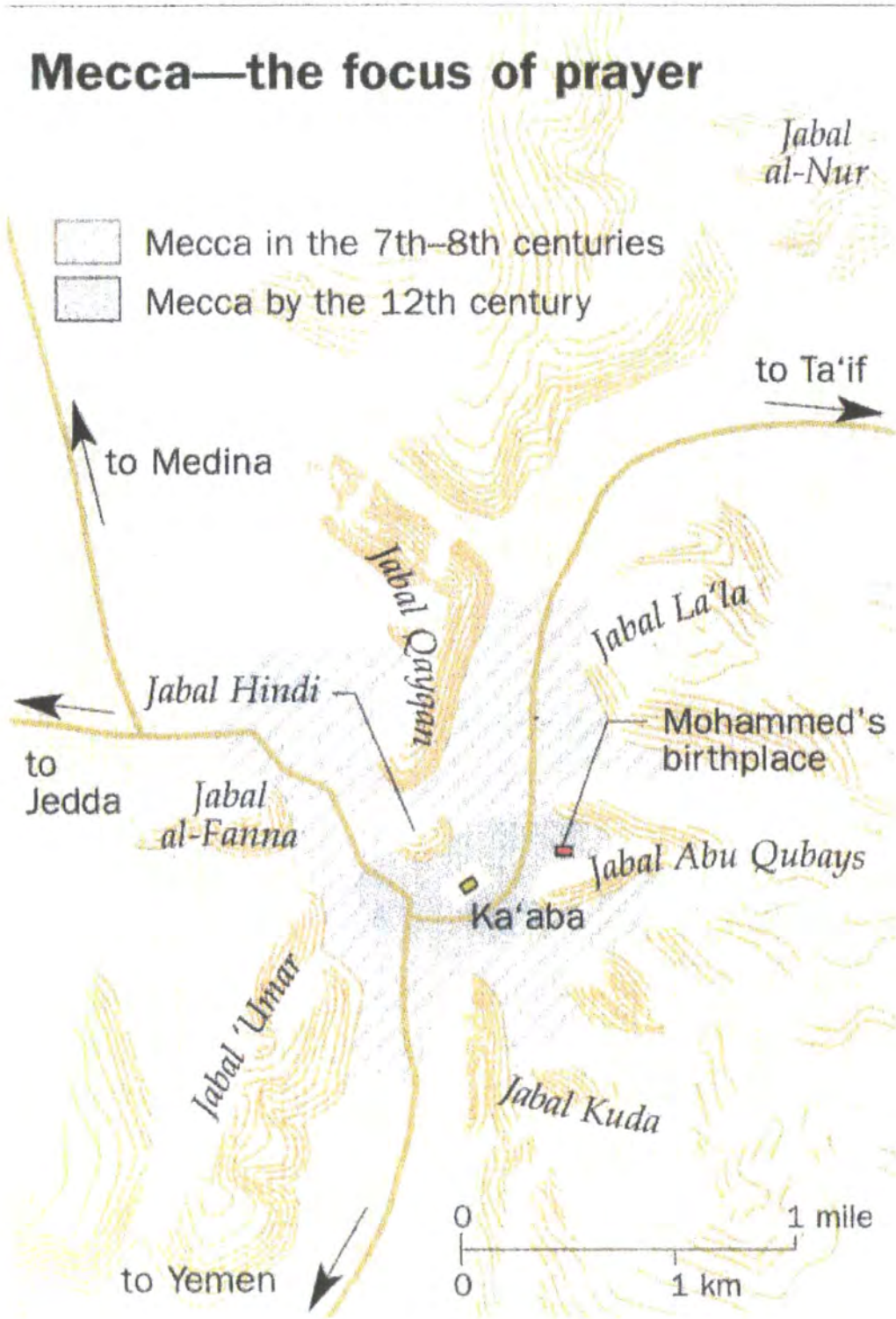
Map 17 **Markets and Fairs in Arabia** (Nicolle, D., 2004, p26)

Map 18 **Trade Routes of Arabia** (Nicolle, D., 2004, p21)

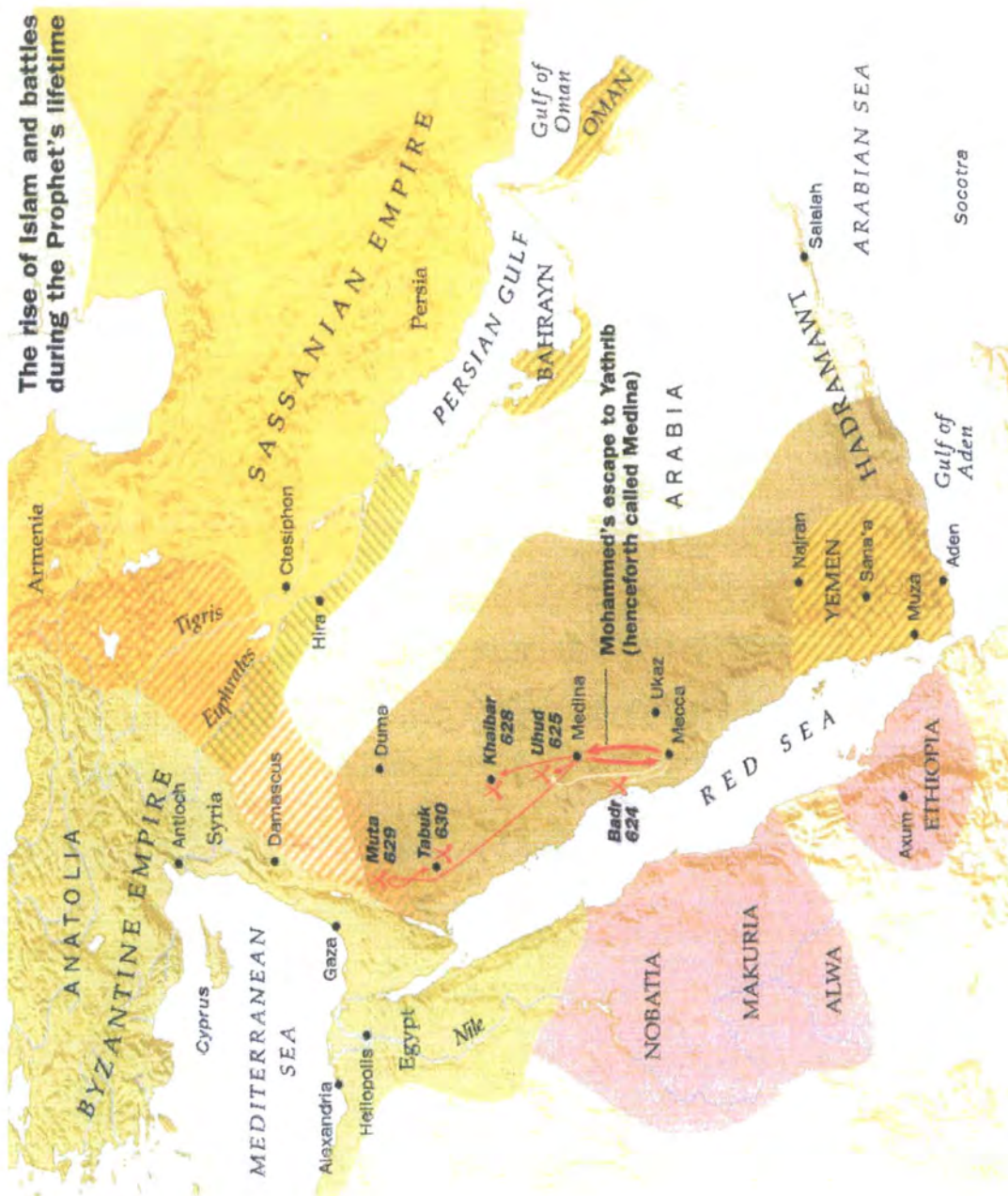


Map 19 **Arabia at the Time of Muḥammad's Death** (Nicolle, D., 2004, p31)

Map 20 **Trade Routes of Mecca** (Nicolle, D., 2004, p 32)

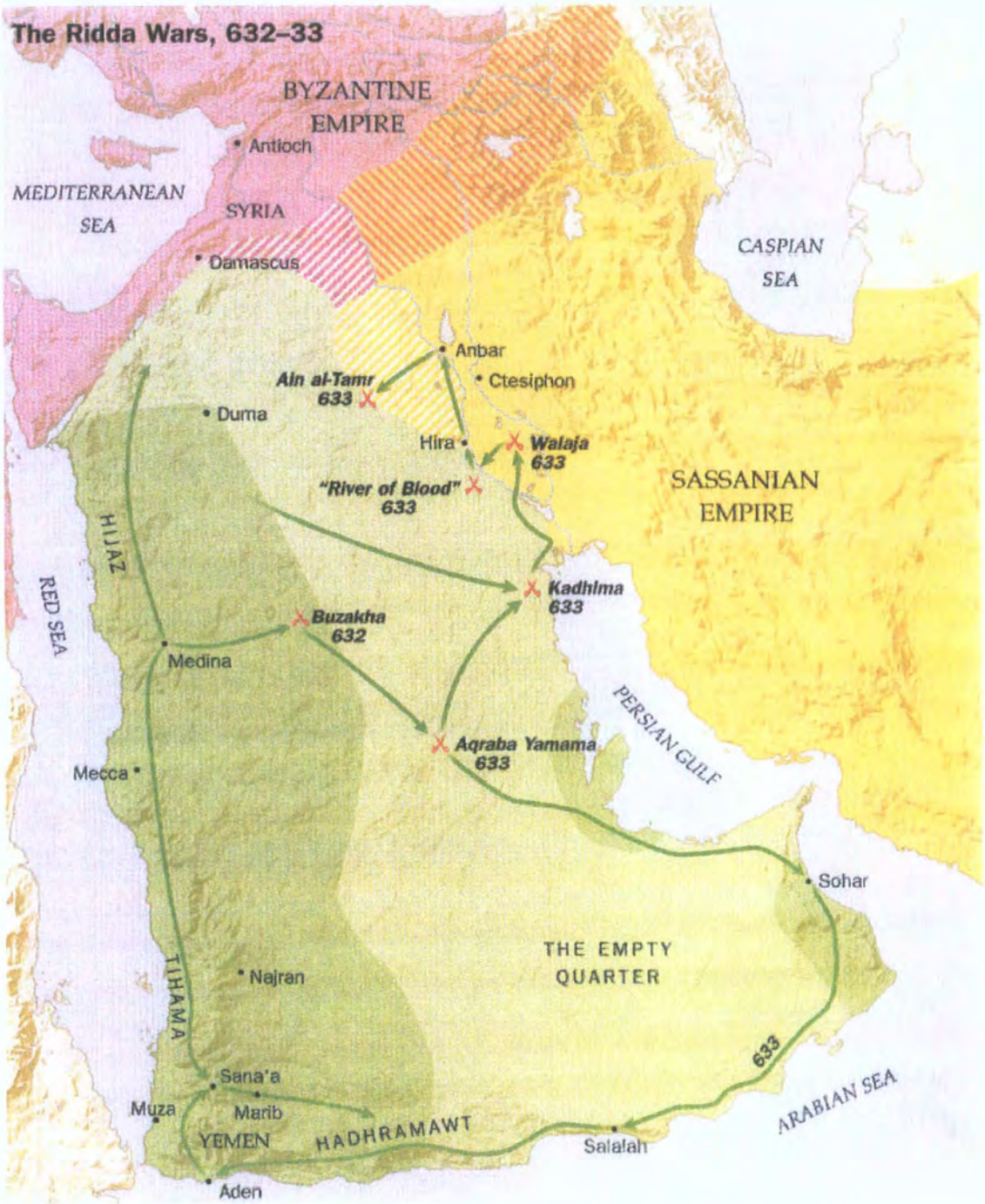


Map 21 **Mecca and the Ka'ba** (Nicolle, D., 2004, p 40)

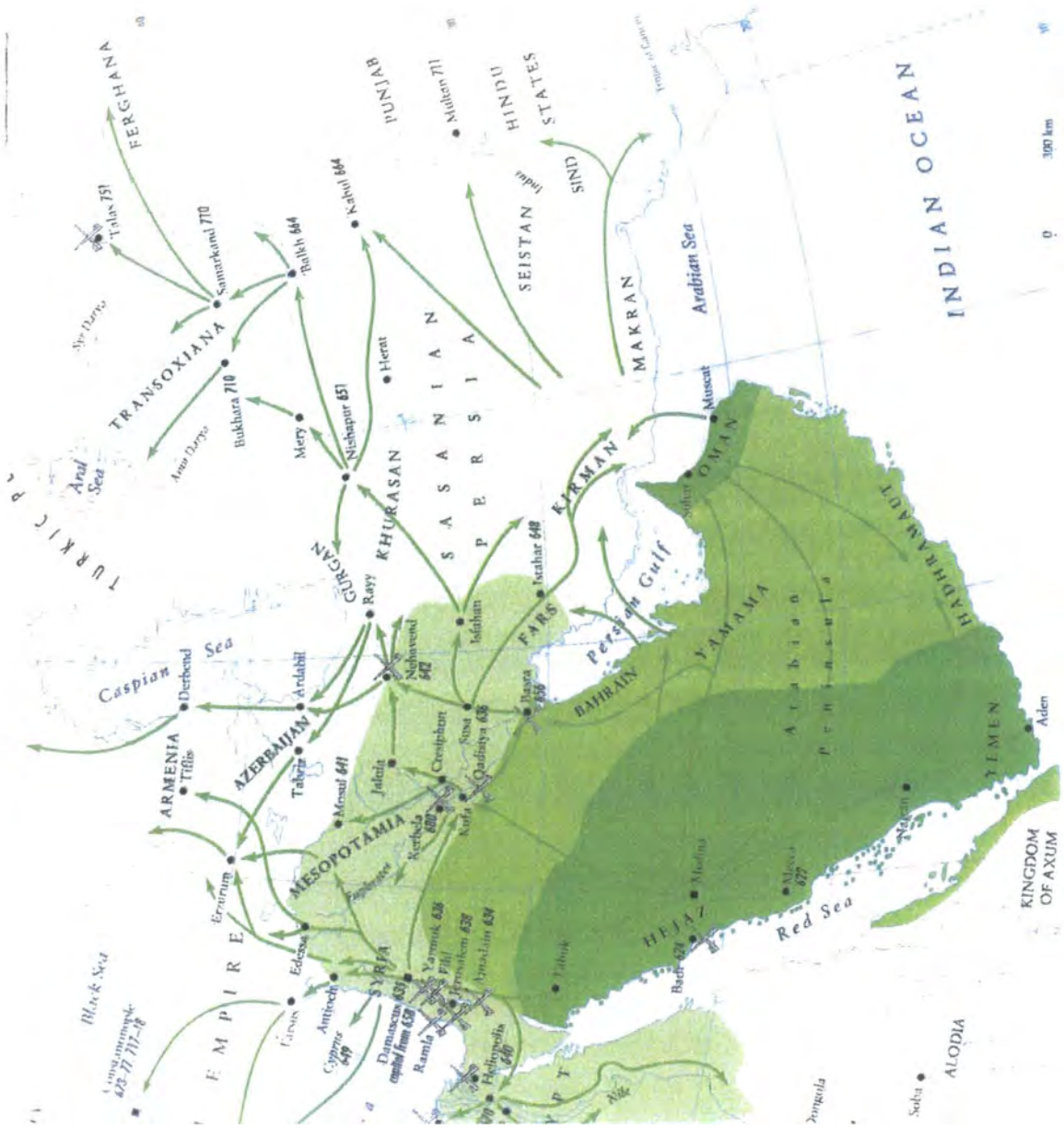


Map 22 **Confrontations During Muḥammad's Lifetime**
(Nicolle, D., 2004, p 35)

Map 23 **Sassanian and Byzantine Conflicts at the turn of the 7th Century**
(Nicolle, D., 2004, p 28)



Map 24 **The Riddah Wars** (Nicolle, D., 2004, p 39)



Map 25 **Islamic Expansion during the Rāshīdūn Period**
(Ruthven, M. with Nanjii, 2004, p 29)

Appendix 2

Diagrams of Genealogical Tree of the Prophet and the Rāshīdūn Caliphs

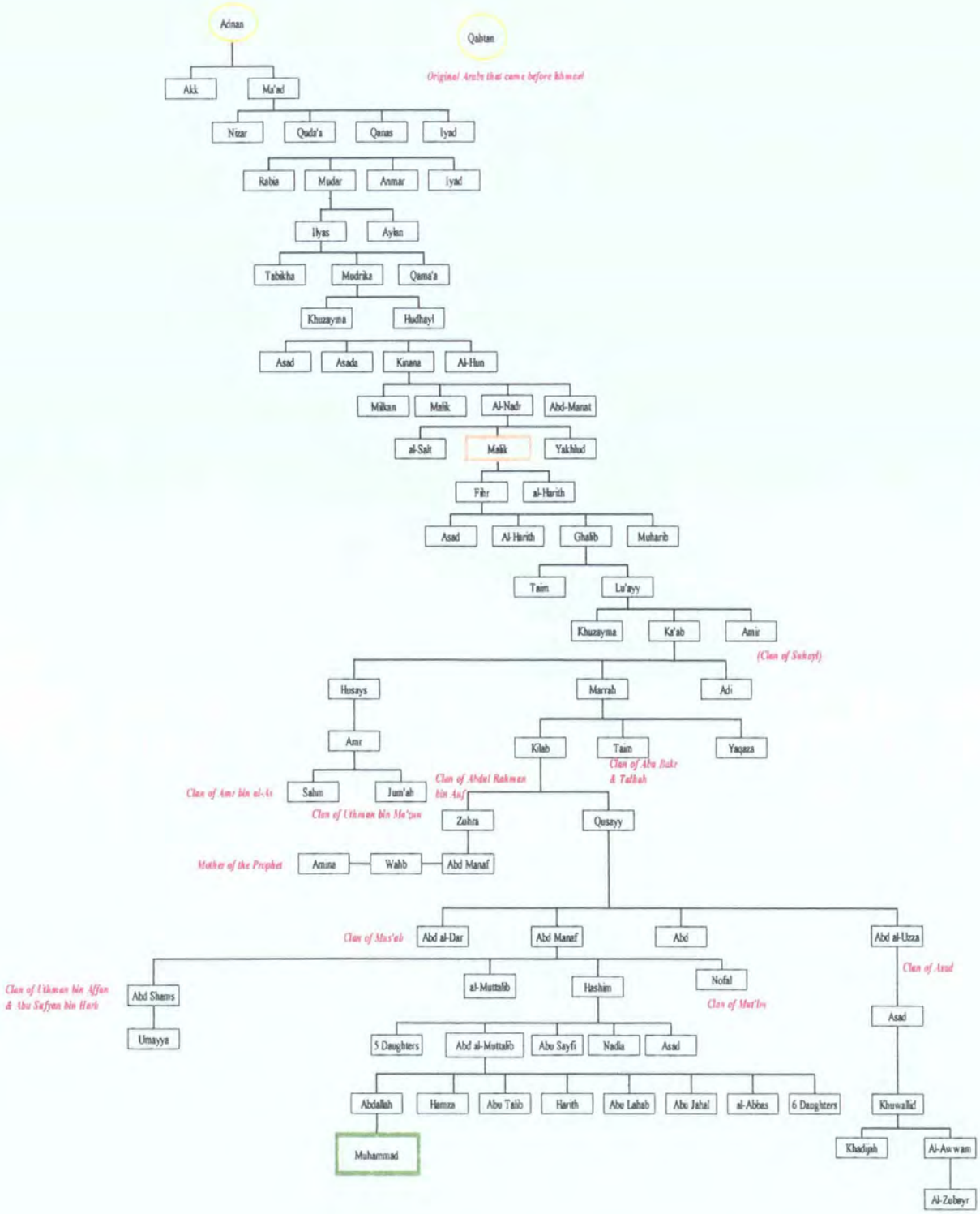
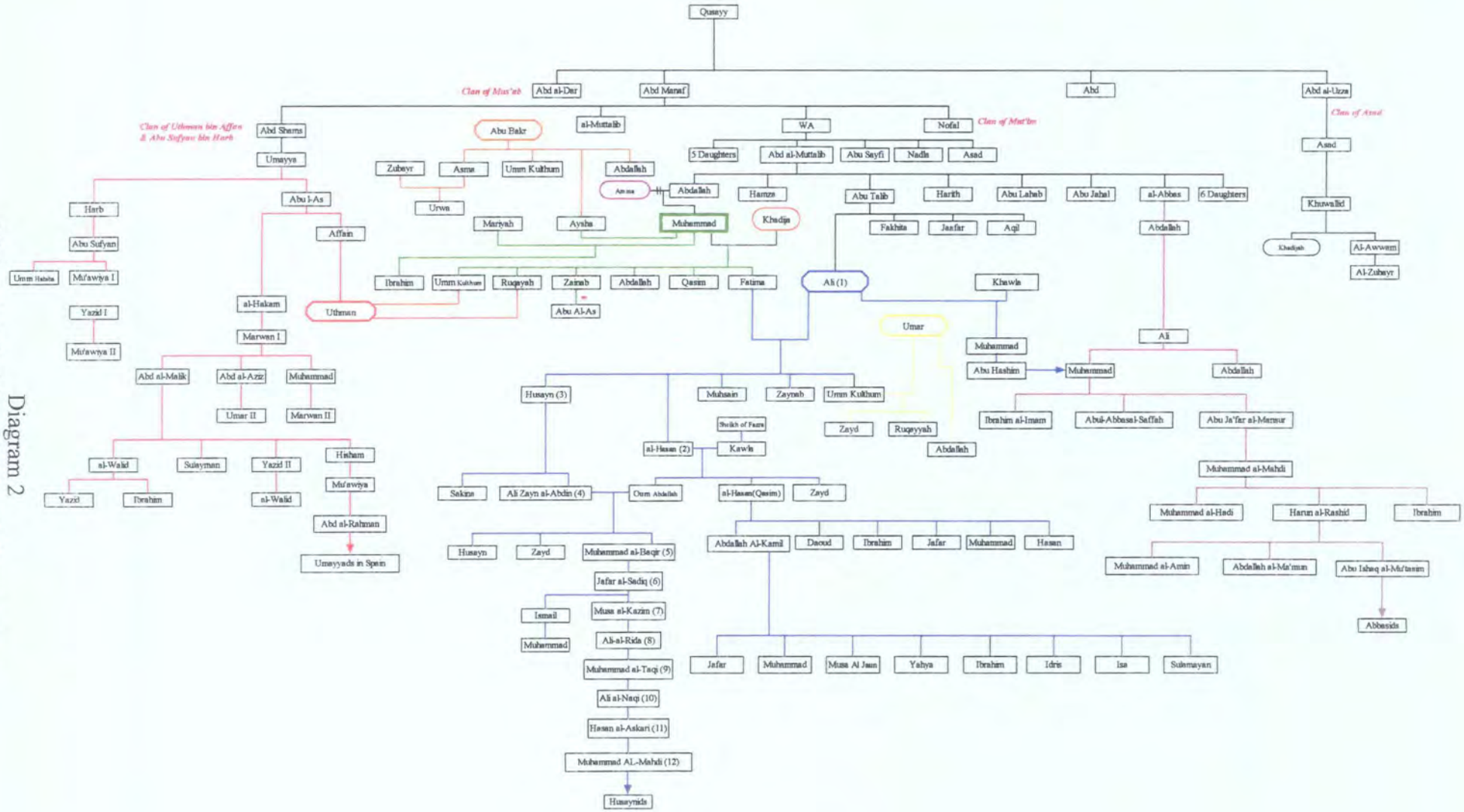


Diagram 1
Muḥammad's Family and Clan

Diagram 2

Muḥammad's Household and Companions



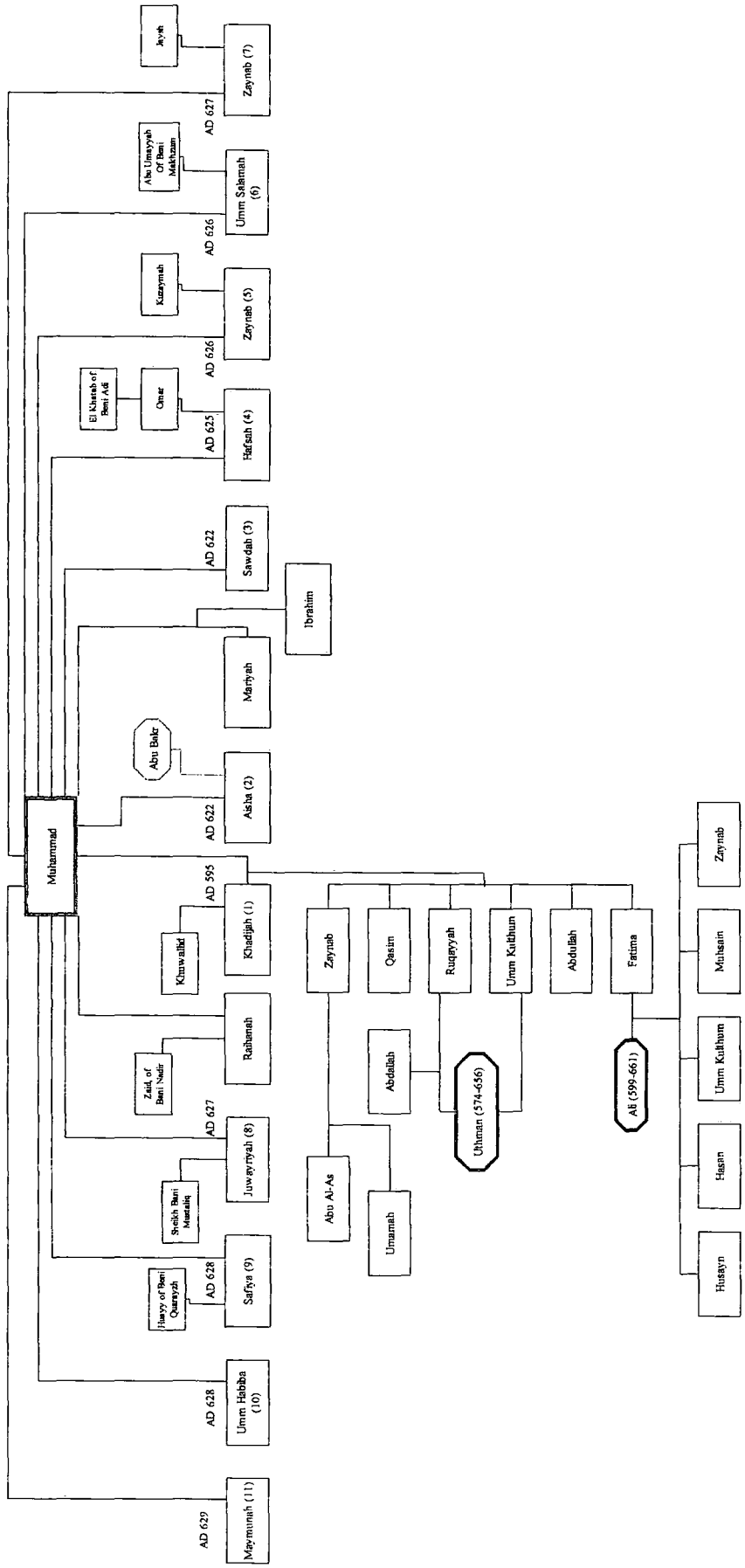


Diagram 3

Muḥammad's Nuclear Family

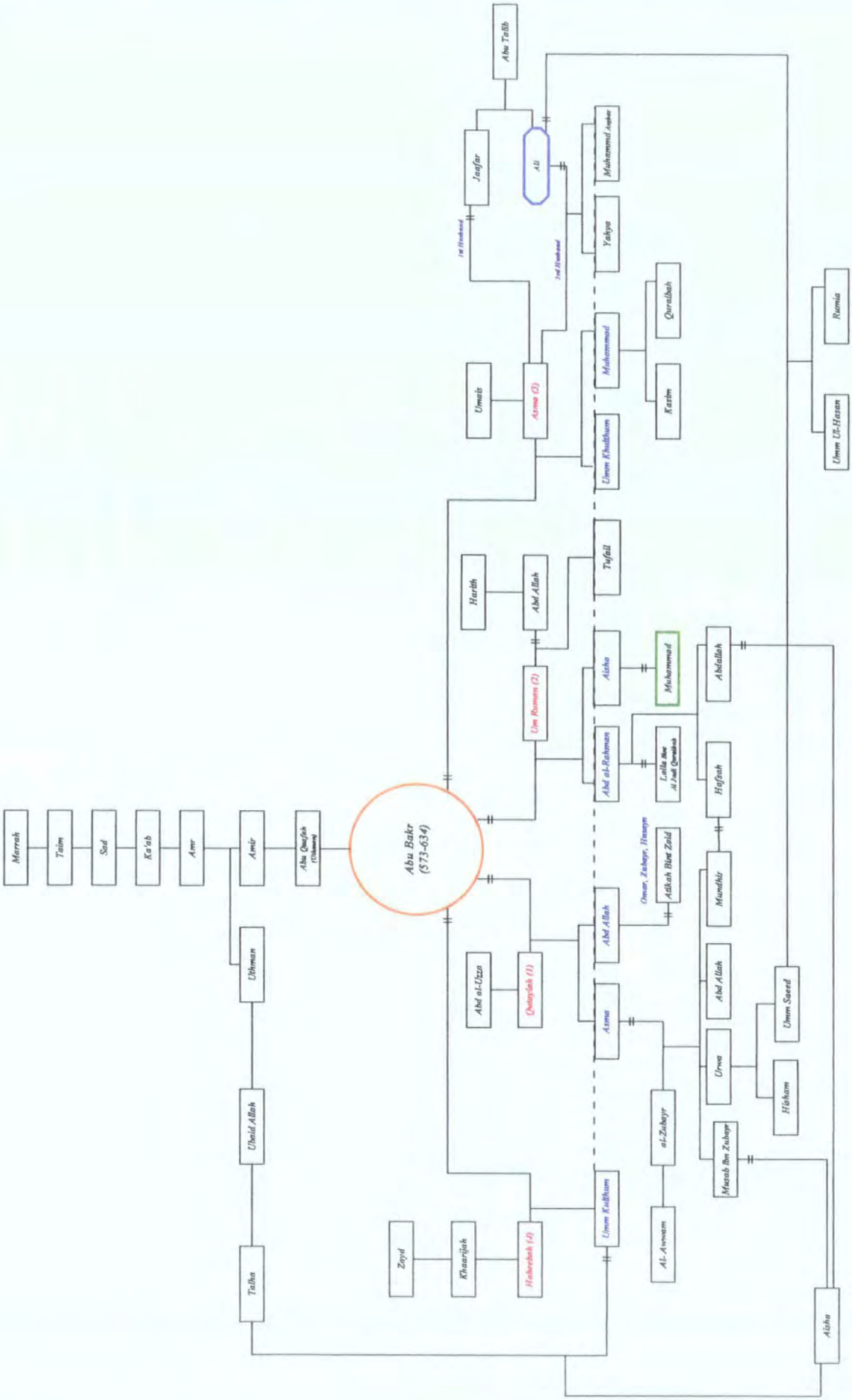


Diagram 4

Household of Abū Bakr

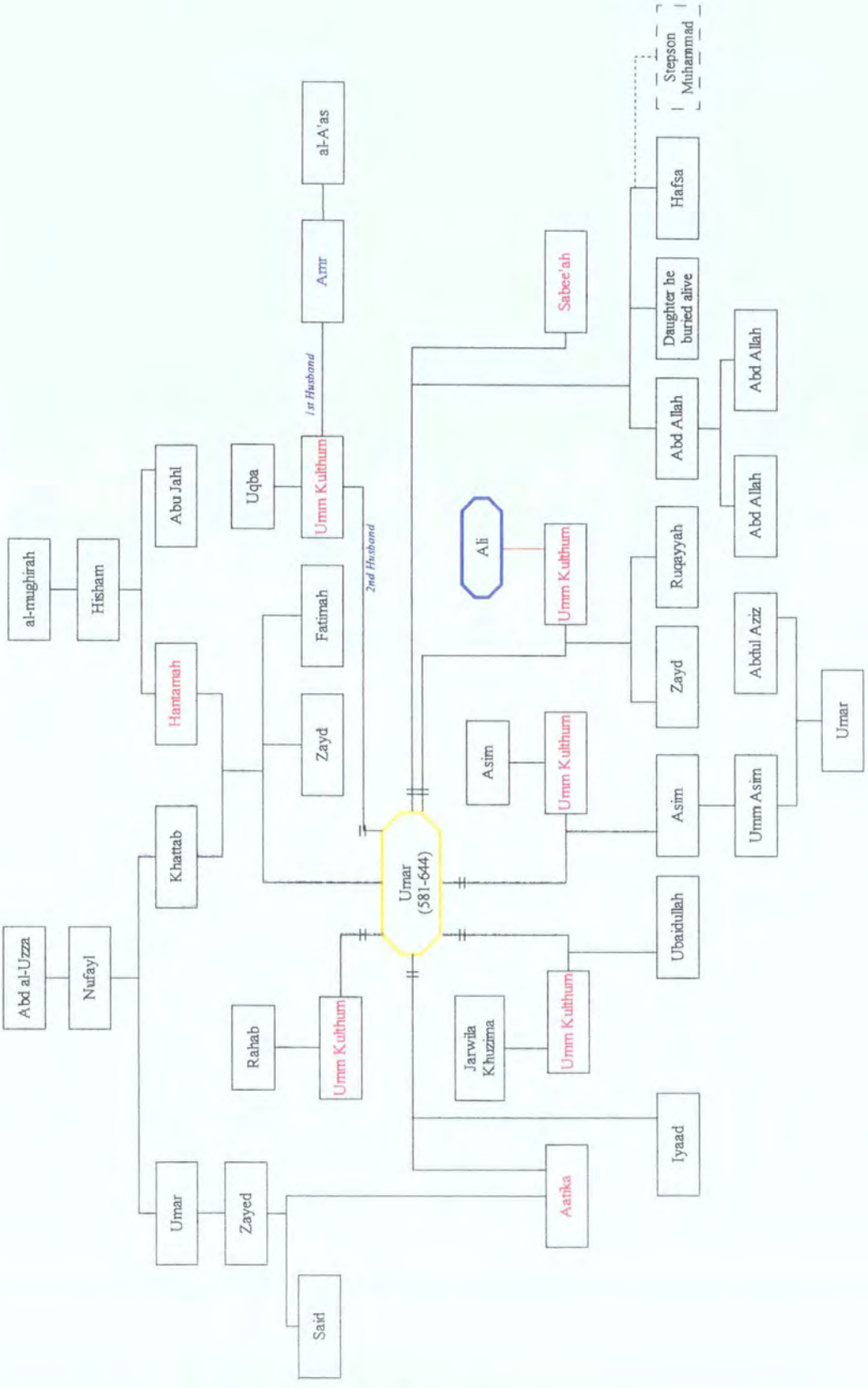


Diagram 5

Household of 'Umar

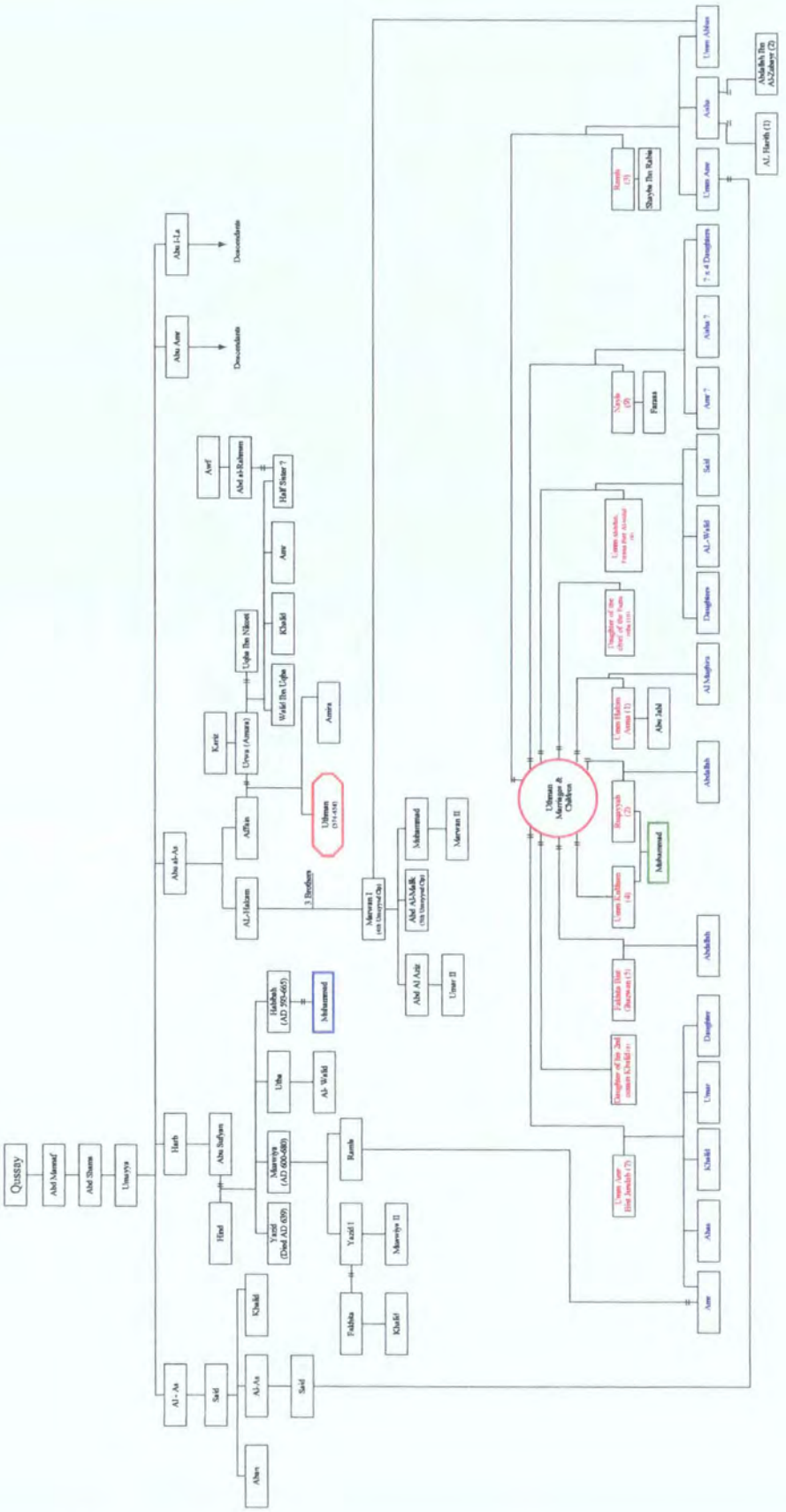


Diagram 6

Household of 'Uthmān

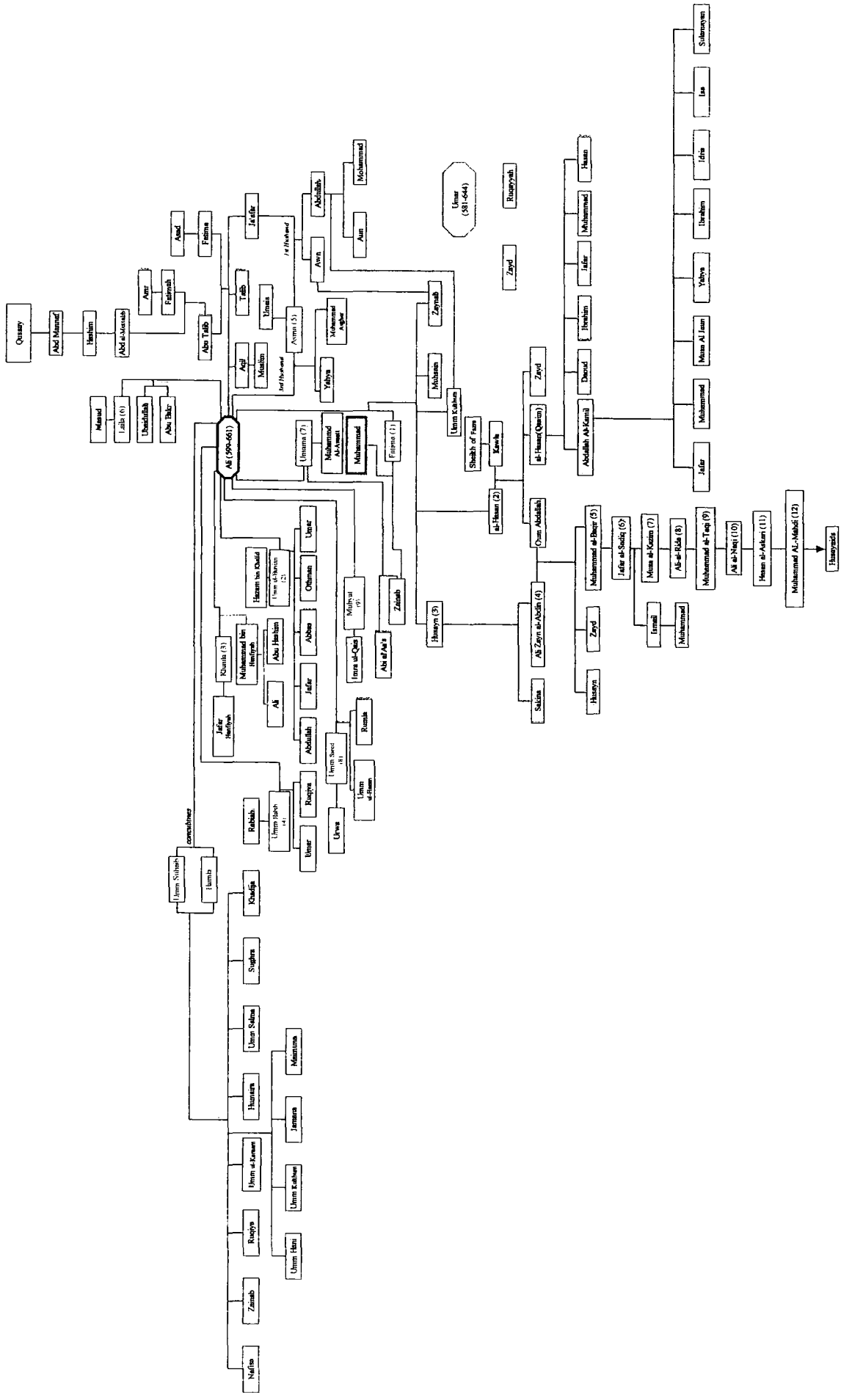


Diagram 7

Household of 'Ali

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